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# **The absence of absence:**

## a (geographical hi)story of the landscape of Blackpool.

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**Kate Shires**

2008



**University of Durham: Geography Department**

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts in the Department of Geography.

- 1 MAY 2009

## Declaration

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## Abstract

Throughout the past decade contemporary human geography has seen a decisive move away from the structuralist analysis of the New Cultural era, to a more fluid, deconstructed and poststructuralist approach, perhaps best encapsulated within the nonrepresentational movement. Yet throughout this 'performative turn' – which has done much to change social and cultural geography, and in particular landscape studies – there has never been so much as a fleeting glance towards the nonpresent. Invariably the lost, decayed, damaged or distorted have remained absent, and so, in response to this, this research aims to rectify the 'absence of absence'.

The narrative begins by looking towards the development of 'landscape' within social and cultural geography, contemplating the dominance of 'presence' over 'absence' and the recent emphasis upon doings, encounters, beings and becomings. Through a sustained critique of this, I begin to draw out various themes, considering how the problem of absence itself may be manipulated and incorporated into narrative form. Through the development of a 'typology of absence' I propose that absence is composed of three broad dimensions; its *capacity*, *temporality* and *affective resonances*, by and through which it is able to permeate into all vistas of the landscape; past, presence, present and absent.

Expounding this idea of the triple dimension of absence, I draw upon series of creative methodologies, developing the typology into a hybrid form of auto-ethnographic montage narrative which develops and forms an extended typology of absence, allowing the accounts themselves to be permeated and distorted with series of infinite nonpresences. Finally, by drawing out these methodologies, I offer several creative encounters with the landscape of Blackpool; merging time frames, distorting and breaking narratives, allowing story lines to be permeated with endless absences and disappearances.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis in itself is a working out of presence and absence – in terms of corporeal presence in Durham and also of the actual narrative presence. The tutorials, writing, drafting and reading all followed intermittent and seemingly arbitrary patterns; both from my perspective, but also from those of my two tutors, Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison. Despite the various hold-ups along the way – hard-work, good humour and pertinent comments arriving at precisely the right moments meant this research was finally able to take shape into this present form. The research has opened my eyes to the nuances and complexities of both absence and presence, and has allowed me to extend and develop my interest of landscape way beyond the parameters of undergraduate study. It is also allowed me to delve into and learn so much more about my family history, realise the sheer pleasure to be gained from creative writing, and enjoy several wonderful day trips to Blackpool.

And so, thanks must go parents for joining me on my daytrips and giving a running commentary on the landscape, as well as hours spent sifting through old photographs and memories. Most importantly though, thanks must go to both Ben and Paul for their help throughout – for encouraging me even when I felt I was staring into infinite vistas and aporias of absence. Without their encouragement or direction I do not think I would have been so bold as to attempt such a creative or experimental approach to landscape narrative. Thank you both for pushing me and always requesting that I went that little bit further; hopefully some of my ideas and methods may be taken up and continued within social and cultural geography – despite my impending absence from the academic world.

# Contents

<b>Declaration</b>	i
<b>Abstract</b>	ii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	iii
<b>Contents</b>	iv
<b>I Introduction: a geographical (hi)story</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II Reviewing the Landscape</b>	
Introduction	5
From Old to New Cultural Geographies	6
The phenomenological landscape	11
Nonrepresentational theory	14
From here	22
<b>III Typologies of Absence</b>	
1.0 Introduction	25
2.0 The absence of absence	26
3.0 The problem of absence	36
4.0 Typologies of absence	40
5.0 Absence within the present	41
5.1 <i>Disappearance</i>	41
5.2 <i>Decay</i>	43
5.3 <i>Loss</i>	44
5.4 <i>Refrain: capacity, temporality and affective resonances</i>	46
6.0 The resurgence of absence from the past	47
6.1 <i>Introduction: hauntologies, memory and storytelling</i>	47
6.2 <i>Hauntologies</i>	49
6.3 <i>Memory</i>	52
6.4 <i>Storytelling</i>	54
6.5 <i>Refrain: capacity, temporality and affective resonances</i>	56
7.0 From here	56
<b>IV Methodologies: gathering fragmented material</b>	
Introduction	58
Ethnography	59
Montage Literature	62
Imaginative Literature	64
From here	66

<b>V</b>	<b>Evanescence: a stormy past</b>	
	Introduction	67
	The turning tide	69
	The candle in the window	72
	Storm Stricken	73
	All at sea	76
	Evanescence	81
<b>VI</b>	<b>Fragments: a (hi)story of Blackpool</b>	
	Introduction	85
	The pole howsys alias the north howsys	86
	Grand narratives: instantaneous memories	87
	Lane Ends Hotel	89
	Holiday Time	91
	Procession of things before our eyes	93
	An archive of memories	94
	The familiar illusion	95
<b>VII</b>	<b>Thinking <i>with</i> absence: a conclusion of sorts</b>	98
<b>VIII</b>	<b>Epilogue: <i>one of many</i></b>	
	Before the holiday	100
	On the way	101
	Upon arrival	101
	Arcade	103
	All forms of entertainment	103
	The penny stakes	104
	Turbulent weather	106
	The final push	107
	Sand in the sandwiches	108
	The final bet	110
	<b>Bibliography</b>	111



**"How do I discover, represent and share the hidden in the taken for granted?"**

Gunnar Olsson, 1991:23.

## I Introduction: a (geographical hi)story

The past, in short, does not tail off like a succession of dots left ever further behind. Such a tail is but the ghost of history, retrospectively reconstructed as a sequence of unique events. In reality, the past is *with* us as we press into the future. In this pressure lies the work of memory, the guiding hand of a consciousness that, as it goes along, also remembers the way. Retracing the lines of past lives is the way we proceed along our own.

Tim Ingold – 2007:119.

Blackpool has very much been a part of my life since I was a little girl. I have been going there from even before I can remember; being pushed along the prom in a pram, evenings at the illuminations, days out with Grandma and Grandad, going up the tower, to Blackpool zoo and other days trips in and around the area. For my parents too, Blackpool has played an integral and formative part in their lives; Daddy was born there *“Montpelier Street – number 61. The corner house; used to grow our own fruit and veg in the back and rent out a room. I moved out aged two and a half”*.



Also for their parents before them, Granny and Grandad went there when they courting, they used to catch the train up from Wigan; *“there used to be loads [of people] on the station, loads of cases – everyone used to go on Wigan Wakes week. It always rained. We used to know everybody though – all Wiganers, couldn’t put a pin between them on the beach, all pit men and workers”*. And their parents too, the lives of my great-grandparents were also very much entwined around and about the landscape of Blackpool; Daddy’s Grandparents moved there from Yorkshire at the end of the war to have a more comfortable and quiet life, they didn’t need much persuasion to leave behind their hard working lives and move to the seaside.



Blackpool is under my skin; it has a homely and welcoming feel, I don’t think I’ve ever had a bad day out in Blackpool. Even when it has been bitterly cold, rainy and miserable, the lashing sea and raw elements have a rousing and stirring quality. I even like its gaudy kitsch. Not too long ago I found myself vehemently defending the otherwise rather rundown resort, waxing lyrical about the fun that can be had on a day out to Blackpool. Whenever I visit, half-forgotten instances surge back to recollection; involuntary memories which are unpredictable and contingent, jostle around in the landscape, they are barely perceptible, yet hugely evocative and extremely powerful in shaping both



landscape and subjectivity. Perhaps these memories are all the more evocative because they have never been subject to deliberate contemplation. Perhaps they surge with such great vigour and are instantly recognisable *because* they can't be held onto, written down or tacked into an album.

My interest lies around these otherwise absent elements within the landscape; how can such affecting and non-categorisable elements which are otherwise so evocative be written into contemporary human geography? These momentary incursions of charged sensualities which are so obvious when *in* the landscape, yet in themselves, in real terms, are contingent, fractured, subjective and elusive, meaning they may be easily ignored and sidelined in preference for more palpable and obviously present elements. What of the affective prompts; the sights, sounds, smells and auras which saturate and are powerful within the landscape. What too of the slippages and moments of loss, particularly within memory, when the landscape feels recognisable but it remains impossible to pin down quite why? And similarly, of the places and situations which we feel hold particular importance, but for reasons which we do not quite understand as details and particularities have long since been forgotten.

And so, these questions become the point of departure for this thesis. Throughout the research I will continue to question how these absent elements may be written into and included within nonrepresentational landscape narratives, questioning quite why these absences have remained absent from contemporary social sciences. Through this, I will develop and begin to problematise absence, questioning both how these moments of absence may be included in contemporary social and cultural geography. I will explore and detail a series of experimental, creative methods and approaches which allow deeper and more meaningful understandings of absence, both in empirical terms and within narratives. Finally, I will also consider what may be afforded by being more receptive to moments and movements of absence within the landscape, demonstrating and showing precisely *why* absence matters.

And so, this thesis is about landscape and absence. In itself the theme of absence is a particularly pertinent in relation to nonrepresentational theory. Indeed, this is not the first critique of its kind to point out the 'absence of absence' within nonrepresentational accounts of self and world (see for instance Anderson, 2006; Harrison, 2007a, 2008; Bissell, 2008). However, whilst it may not be the first in delineating this short-coming within nonrepresentational theory, it is the first to do so explicitly in relation to landscape. Hence, I shall begin via a brief exposition of 'landscape', (Chapter II), which has in recent years seen a renewed surge of interest becoming an important forum for changing philosophical positions and critical agendas within the discipline. The review will begin by detailing developments from Old to New Cultural Geographies following the nuances and complexities of different landscaping traditions. The main focus of the chapter however, falls upon the recent uptake of phenomenological philosophies in human geography which has meant

the concept of 'landscape' has experienced a decisive performative turn (Ingold, 2000[1993]; Thrift, 1996, 1997, 1999). The review in turn will provide an exposition of the main concepts and thinkers within this performative turn, and, whilst noting all the promise that a nonrepresentational approach holds for landscaping traditions, it will begin to question some of the problems implicit within this relational ontology and the implications of these upon landscape and landscape narratives.

Following this exposition of landscape, I will begin to critically develop themes and problems surrounding absence. Chapter III, *typologies of absence*, extends the critique of the 'absence of absence' in nonrepresentational theory. It discusses the importance of absence and suggests why and how it may be incorporated into contemporary human geography through notions of the 'nonrelational' (Harrison, 2007a, b, 2008), sendentaryism (Bissell, 2008) and plenitude (Anderson, 2006). From this, it becomes obvious that not only is absence ubiquitous, but also that it may be incorporated into social sciences through a series of diverse and distinctive methods. Through a consideration, exploration and development of the 'problem of absence', I begin to set out a formalisation of the nonpresent, which considers its constant multiplication and proliferation of nonpresences. Most importantly, I suggest that the 'movements' of absence are of critical importance for understanding, considering and incorporating absence into contemporary human geography. In turn, I suggest, these movements become apparent through the triple dimensions of *capacity*, *temporality* and *affective resonances*. And it is through this triple-dimensional approach that I am able to begin considering the various typologies of absence within landscape, commenting both upon how they play out and also how they may be incorporated into landscape narratives.

Following this *typologies of absence*, I continue to proceed along the same lines of formalisation, discussing some of the possible methodologies appropriate for gathering empirical moments which admit absence into landscape narratives (Chapter IV). In many ways this methodology is somewhat 'make-do', that is not to say it is disorganised or unplanned, but rather open-ended and experimental. Second to this, due to the nature of the research considering absence both in landscape *and* narratives, the second half of the methodology considers the ways in which creative styles of writing may incorporate and generate absences in themselves. In particular I consider the use of montage literature (Pred, 1995), fictocriticism (Kerr, 2001; Mueke, 2002) and imaginative styles of non-fiction which fall into a genre of 'quasi-ethnographic travelogue' (Stewart, 1996; Sebald, 1998, 2001, 2002).

Following this exploration of the types of narratives which are receptive to slippages and absences, Chapters V and VI utilise montage and fictocritic methods based upon my own empirical experiences in Blackpool. The narratives trace out the lines of multiplication of absence, detailing the ways in which it proliferates and plays out in both landscape *and* narratives. These chapters show the elusive nature of absence, and as such, do not attempt to pin down or characterise it in

definitive or objective terms, but rather offer two possible creative and exploratory narrative threads, tracing only *some* of the subjective, contingent and proliferating absences within landscape.

The aim throughout this thesis is not to cover or touch upon all the vast and infinite vistas of absence. If absence is the flip-side of presence as I wish to suggest, then to comment upon all absences would be impossible. Hence, this research hopes to demonstrate and touch upon *some* of the absences; detailing and presenting possible forms of narratives which are inclusive of the moments and movements of the ubiquitous nonpresences. The research should be taken as a prolegomenon whose aim is to offer suggestive methods and ways in which contemporary social and cultural geography may become more receptive to absence. By way of conclusion, I will offer one final narrative in the form of an epilogue (Chapter VIII), and, as with all the other chapters in this thesis it hopes to open up new possibilities, potentialities and affordances of absence within landscape and landscape narratives.

## II Reviewing the Landscape

### Introduction

This literature review is a broad exposition on the notion of 'landscape' as it has been understood within social and cultural geography over the last fifty years. It primarily aims to concentrate on and discuss the most recent developments over the past decades which have moved the notion of 'landscape' from both a structured and structuring notion in New Cultural Geography into the realm of nonrepresentational theory (NRT). The chapter is roughly divided into four substantive sections; the first details the key advocates in landscape studies within the New Cultural movement during the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, discussing the work of Cosgrove (1984, 1985), Cosgrove & Daniels (1988), Duncan & Duncan (1988), Barnes & Duncan (1992) and Duncan & Ley (1993). It will detail their role in the changing the notion of 'landscape' from a broadly empiricist understanding inherited from the Old Cultural School, into one based far more upon a cultural-structuralist reading.

The second section of the chapter will focus upon a phenomenologically informed conception of landscape, in particular discussing the work of Tim Ingold (2000[1993]) and Nigel Thrift (1996, 1997, 1999). It will consider how landscape has become understood in terms of embodiment and practice, where ideas of 'being-in-the-world' and dwelling are constantly emergent, and as such, creates an account of landscape which significantly disrupts the previous New Cultural Geographic reading of landscape. Building upon this, the chapter will move directly onto a discussion of nonrepresentational theory, which, for ease, will be divided into three further sections. The first part will discuss how nonrepresentational theory has developed and in particular will focus upon the work of the main thinkers, Harrison, Wylie, Anderson, McCormack and Dewsbury<sup>1</sup>, whose work remains integral in producing the theory behind the empirical studies which have subsequently developed under the broad banner of NRT. The second section will briefly focus upon how these themes have been taken up and used within geography and the wider social sciences, commenting upon the general themes and commonalities running throughout these nonrepresentational accounts, demonstrating how self and subjectivity come about through embodiment and practice. The final section within this exposition on landscape literature, will discuss the three main advocates who have taken up and used nonrepresentational theories within landscape studies; Lorimer (2003a, b, 2006), Rose (2002, 2006, 2007) and Wylie (2005, 2006a).

Throughout this literature review I aim to provide a solid grounding and theoretical basis from which future landscape writing can work. Hence, I will offer a forward-looking conclusion which will acknowledge the importance of nonrepresentational theory in changing and diversifying the face of landscape studies, discussing the challenges and short-comings which have

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<sup>1</sup> For full details and references, see 'nonrepresentational theory', pp.14.

arisen through this shift towards more post-phenomenologically informed philosophies within landscape writing; before finishing through a comment upon my concerns and hopes for the future of landscape and landscape writing.

### **From Old to New Cultural Geographies**

Before any discussion of New Cultural Geographic perspective on landscape, I will briefly mention the main academics of the Old Cultural School, Carl Sauer, W.G. Hoskins and J.B. Jackson who initiated an understanding of the concept of 'landscape' as a broad geographical domain.

'Landscape' as an entity has had a central role within social and cultural geography since its initial inauguration around a century ago. The concept originally began as a responsive critique to social Darwinism which led to the development of the *cultural landscape* as advocated by the Berkeley School under the direction of Carl Sauer throughout the 1920s. The inception of the idea of 'landscape' became the principle domain in which human interaction could be analysed and assessed in relation to the physical landscape and has dominated and infiltrated the human geographic discipline in both North America and Britain over the past 100 years. Within the *cultural landscape* 'culture' is conceptualised as a set of characteristics which can be read through traced and matched to particular groups. In Anglo geography, this concept was further manipulated by W.G. Hoskins (*The making of the English Landscape*, 1954) who maintained the empiricist stance advocated by Sauer, but applied it within a broader historical dimension to produce a local, archaeological-of-sort, landscape history. Finally, the third significant figure in shaping the initial notion of landscape is J.B. Jackson (1984). Again, in synch with his predecessors, Jackson maintained an empirical approach towards the landscape, although, and most significantly, he heralded the first move away from a rural, somewhat-romanticised view of landscape, focussing instead upon *vernacular* everyday landscapes. It was the first decisive move to consider landscape as a fluid entity in which we live and are party to, rather than outside spectators.

This brief exposition of the three main writers in early landscape studies shows that even since the first inception of landscape as an entity in social and cultural geography, it has been a unique spatial category. It is a concept which is open to change and adaptation; and whilst these three advocates conceptualise landscape in terms of appearance attained through empirical methods, they put in place a distinct rationale for understanding landscape as a physical or material entity understood via visual means. Such themes, which, although having been significantly manipulated, still remain integral to and have direct implications upon contemporary social and cultural geography's understanding of landscape, as shall be shown throughout the rest of this literature review.

The dominance of the Old Cultural School of thought on landscape began to wane during the 'cultural-turn' of the mid-1980s. The new orientation towards more cultural and structuralist

theoretical frameworks had a series of significant ramifications upon the way in which landscape was understood. Most notably, the 'external' and 'empiricist' emphasis inherited from the Old Cultural School was directly challenged, and a more general move away from materialist to more aesthetic perspectives were incorporated into landscape studies. Landscape was now less about the physical attributes and more centred upon its visual affordances such as *representations* in landscape art. This emphasis upon the visual saw a significant shift towards 'interpretation' over 'description', and 'seeing' instead of 'seen'. Landscape was now understood through representations which were analysed in terms of broader structural explanations such as 'culture', 'identity' and 'power'.

This development of the New Cultural understanding of landscape, bound within the wider cultural turn, can be understood through a series of three expositions. Significantly, all three developments are determined and based upon notions of visibility, particularly in relation to how the landscape is conceived and analysed. The first, 'landscape as a way of seeing' was influenced heavily by Cosgrove (1985) who set out a broad outline for the defining features of landscape within the New Cultural domain. The second development within New Cultural Geography augments this idea; whereas Cosgrove's analysis is based predominantly upon landscape paintings as images of reality, the second movement applies methodologies of analysis directly *onto* the landscape, both 'real' and 'imagined', 'created' or 'natural' (Cosgrove, 1984; Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988). Finally, this leads to the third development within the New Cultural School of thought which examines the idea of 'landscape as a text' looking towards the various potential interpretive techniques which may be used to analyse the landscape in terms of intertextuality and other overriding structures (Duncan & Duncan, 1988; Barnes & Duncan, 1992; Duncan & Ley, 1993).<sup>2</sup>

To begin, Cosgrove's *Prospect, perspective and evolution of the landscape idea* (1985), is a seminal paper in defining landscape as a 'way of seeing'. As a starting point for New Cultural Geography, it defines landscape as "remaining close to the popular usage of the word as an artistic or literary response to the visible scene" (1985:46). And so, right from the very inception of this New Cultural technique of considering landscape, there is a distinct emphasis upon the value which may be gained from drawing upon representations of landscape. Moreover, Cosgrove suggests that by doing so, it becomes possible to answer a range of geographical questions *through* these very representations. And importantly, tied to these landscape representations is the importance of development of perspective through an amalgamation of both maths and physics. Together, these theoretical developments and the idea of 'perspective' allowed the idea of 'landscape as a representation' to be brought into being.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this section I focus explicitly upon the influence of the New Cultural school of Geography in landscape studies, this is not, of course, to disavow or deny the importance of other influential schools, for instance Humanists and the work of Relph (1976), Tuan (1977), Meinig (1979) and others which significantly shaped and determined understandings of landscape throughout the 1970s and 1980s.



Ingrained within these representations however, are questions of dominance, authority and control brought about through access to painting both in terms of production and ownership. Cosgrove's work offers recognition on how landscapes are grounded in terms of power; a dominance which always flatters the bourgeois society allowing them to impose a subjective meaning on landscape. Cosgrove goes even as far as to suggest that authority over landscape perhaps even determines a material transformation of land *into* private property (pp.55). Aside from this, questions over vision, society and economic relations are also raised, with important ramifications when considering genres of art aside from those produced in the Renaissance. Similarly, notions of control and authority are transferable to all representations of landscape, from fine art to cartography, photography to GIS; all of which, notes Cosgrove, form a significant part of the way in which European cultures understand themselves in terms of nature, culture and power. Hence, through an analysis of these overriding and dominant structures it becomes possible to understand *all* landscapes as a way of seeing. Put simply, it means that all landscape is conceived *always already* as representation, to be read and analysed as a production of the cultural imagination (Wylie, 2007a:68).

The second development within New Cultural Geography is not hugely distinct from Cosgrove's understanding of landscape as 'a way of seeing'. It draws upon similar ideas of unpacking discursive structures written into landscape. However its analysis eludes any distinction between 'real' or 'imagined' landscapes meaning that the critical methods of analysis used by Cosgrove on Renaissance Art (1985) and other representative landscapes (1984), may also be used upon 'actual' landscapes in themselves. "A landscape park is more palpable but no more real, no less imaginary, than a landscape painting or a poem" (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988:1). This move is, as Olwig (1996:630) suggests, "a melting of landscape into cybertextual space". In many ways, landscape understood in these terms falls into place once again through an empirical and tangible understanding, which, although far more reliant upon the visual, is far more in keeping with the Old Cultural School. That is to say, the landscape is interpreted, approached and categorised from a subjective positioning, where the image of the outer façade, the part which is analysed, obscures the intimate goings-on of the inhabitants within. However, it remains a landscape shrouded in authority and power, capable of excluding certain figures and able to preserve the elitist grasp over the landscape.

This second development within New Cultural Geography, as Wylie succinctly puts it, could be described as a "seeming epistemological collapse between the distinction of 'image' and 'reality'" (2007a:69). This leads directly to what I would consider as the final phase in landscape studies in New Cultural Geography. That is, the reduction of image to reality allowing the landscape to seemingly become a text in its own right; it is a domain which is open to being read in the same way in which other constructed texts would be analysed and explored for meaning.

To read a landscape as a text, a series of techniques are borrowed mainly from literary theory and combined with social and cultural theories to allow a broad interpretive reading of landscape. For instance, Saussurean linguistic theory or Barthian semiotics allows a certain “deciphering, decoding and authenticating of ‘true’ invariable meaning” (Duncan & Duncan, 1988:118). Ultimately, such readings of ‘landscape as a text’ through processes of decoding allow a relational understanding through a correspondence with objects of reference within the ‘real world’. These readings are then placed within the wider social and discursive ensembles of words, signs and images, allowing meaning from different realms of landscape to be gathered. It is a “semiotic or hermeneutic approach that treats landscape as an allegory of psychological or ideological themes” (W.J.T. Mitchell, 2002[1994]:1).

However, critiques of this method of conceiving landscape suggest that innate within any idea of ‘reading’ are the immediate implications of authority of authorship and interpretation. Reading is not a neutral task and hence there is a tendency for the interpretations of the powerful cultural elite to dominate. This results in a reading of the landscape as a text which conveys and perpetuates series of ideological narratives; vistas of power, authority and control become analysed in structural terms. Crucially, the reader who is often already a privileged figure, is situated within the landscape they are deciphering and so merely become part of the ongoing intertextual production adding a further bias into the reading. This ‘gazing’ subject which the New Cultural Geographers clearly locate within a certain set of class relations was later extended via Gillian Rose’s critique of the *visuality* of the landscape, suggesting the figure *also* ought to be seen as gendered (G. Rose, 1993).

Another alternative take and critique of this NCG reading of landscape emerged through North American literatures throughout the 1990s, namely through the work Don Mitchell (1995; 1998) and Richard Schein (1997). The North American account on landscape sits somewhat ambivalently within a periodicised landscape literature review as it “heavily critiques some tendencies [of NCG], but also in part chimes with them” (Wylie, 2007:100). Within the work of both Mitchell and Schein, landscapes are viewed both as “material form *and* epistemological framework” (Schein, 1997:661). Accentuation is placed upon the *production* of landscape, “emphasising the human agency... the spatial and visual strategies and empowering possibilities inherent for individual human action upon the landscape” (Schein, 1997:664). These sustained critiques suggest a naturalised, stable ‘culture’ is not ontologically suitable (Mitchell, 1995:102), instead the materialist mechanics of landscape production is emphasised over and above the notion of privileged ‘cultures’, read within the landscape text.

The final problem which arises when considering ‘landscape as a text’, referring to the entire discursive ensemble of words, signs, images and so forth, is a problem immediately related to any textual analysis. Whether based upon literature or within the actual landscape, the problem

of representation has significant ramifications upon meanings and understandings. Duncan & Ley (1993) try to situate landscape within this 'crisis of representation'; throughout *Place/Culture/Representation* they note this is a problem which faces all historians (pp.4), extending and discussing the various ways in which it may be overcome within landscape writing. Barnes & Duncan (1992) also recognise, "writing is *not* a faithful duplication of an external reality" (pp.xiii) suggesting discourse, text, metaphor and prior knowledge all have significant influence upon the final reading. And so, in an aim to counteract this problem, the last phase of New Cultural Geographers made a decisive move towards a poststructural analysis of landscape texts. Duncan & Duncan (1988:118) for instance recognise the "web-like complexity characterised by a ceaseless play of infinitely unstable meanings". Analysis, influenced by Derridean reading of texts, began to be transferred to landscapes, demonstrating multiple intertextualities and constant movements and fluxes occurring within landscapes. Landscape in itself is still considered as a representation, however, within this there is a greater recognition of the materiality, historicity and sociality which creates a depth of meaning and structure within this landscape text over and above which larger scale overriding structures are analysed.

Whilst there are significant benefits to be gained from considering and analysing landscape as a text, for instance, gauging landscape in terms of key Marxist structures of power, authority and exchange, there still remains an interstice between the final text or landscape and the actual worked in and lived phenomena of the landscape itself. This interstice has however been partially addressed by one of the key advocates of what Wylie terms the 'second phase' of New Cultural Geography: Anglo social and cultural geographer, David Matless (1995, 1996, 1998), suggests that the question of what landscape "'is' or 'means' can always be subsumed into how it works" (1998:12). By working through questions of landscape, subjectivity and citizenship, Matless conflates questions of materiality *and* representation; and as such, the landscape "becomes neither secure ground for study nor simply a source for symbol" (1996:382). By tracing objects and practices, which incidentally are also inclusive of painting and writing, landscape becomes seen as a cultural *process*. Finally, it allows an identification with specific practices within the landscape which work through cultures, allowing an exploration of the 'physicality' rather than merely 'textuality' of landscape, meaning landscape becomes constituted through material and discursive practices of an everyday nature (Scott, 2006:482).

Despite this swing towards a more poststructuralist, intertextual and practised approach to landscape, questions still arise about how specific forms of identity and power come about, and how these work to pattern the landscape in ways in which are then analysed by the New Cultural reading of the landscape as text. Specifically this raises a series of sociological and philosophical questions borne from the lack of empirical or tactile engagement with the landscape; they are questions which delve beyond and surpass the New Cultural perspective, enquiring how 'practices'

become subsumed into and accountable as constituents of specific cultures. It is a critique which necessitates a need for researching the everyday goings-on, practices and doings of individuals within the actual lived landscape. This is a query which perhaps may only be answered via a substantial shift in the sociological and philosophical approach to landscape, one which requires a more embodied and phenomenological approach to landscape. As such, it is a move beyond the New Cultural perspective, questioning the actual formation of the very structures which the New Cultural Geographers seek to understand (M. Rose, 2002, 2006). It is worth mentioning at this point, that this critique emerged in tandem with feminist geographies. As such, the swing from visually dominant conceptions of landscape to an embodied approach, which I have characterised here in broadly nonrepresentational terms, does in fact owe much to the development of feminist geographies throughout the mid-1990s. Whilst it is distinctly beyond the scope of this piece to review and assess the direct influence of feminist geographies on landscape studies and nonrepresentational theory, it is perhaps worth mentioning, as Gillian Rose herself suggests, that “the more recent work on landscape could not have happened without feminist geography, and yet it’s rarely acknowledged” (Rose, speaking at the 2006 RSG-IBG conference, cited in Merriman *et al.*, 2008:204).

### **The phenomenological landscape**

In order to answer these queries levelled at the underlying makeup of landscape which forms the larger structures then analysed by the New Cultural Geographers, there has to be a shift towards a more empirically astute engagement within the landscape. This shift may broadly be characterised as a movement from landscape as *seen* into a landscape defined through *seeing* and other tactile and sensory engagements. It is a movement matched by a wider trend favouring poststructuralist philosophies over structuralist theories, and one which allowed the development of New Cultural Geographies into nonrepresentational theory. This section of the literature review hopes to detail the main works which caused such a decisive turn to come about from New Cultural Geography to nonrepresentational theory. The work of both Tim Ingold (2000[1993]) and Nigel Thrift (1996, 1997, 1999) has been seen as integral in working through of the underlying theories which bridge the gap between New Cultural Geographies and nonrepresentational theory, and so this section aims to give a brief exposition of their work and direct influences in this radical shift.

However, prior to an exposition of their work, I will give a brief overview of the aims which propelled these theoretical developments. The nonrepresentational landscape, as already mentioned, takes on the guise of a critical understanding of landscape as ‘a way of seeing’, where the basis of the critique is stimulated by a more general move from structuralist to poststructuralist philosophies. The idea of landscape as an image and representation read through particular

cultural codes not only obscures the underlying practices within the landscape, but also imposes and perpetuates a series of “false and unsustainable divisions” (Thrift, 1999:301). Subject/object, image/reality, culture/nature and so forth are problematic in themselves, however, there is also an inherent static quality within these dualisms, which, when considering the fluid nature of culture, landscape and other defining structures which the New Cultural School were intent upon delineating, become even more problematic. Again, this is an area which nonrepresentational theory has built upon and extended within the notion of landscape as ‘a way of seeing’. Previously, the New Cultural perspective had effaced the Old Cultural idea of a tangible and objective landscape which could be empirically understood, as such New Cultural Geographies were defined instead by “subjective perception over objective entity” (Wylie, 2007a:8). And so, in an aim to get back to the underlying practices within the landscape, nonrepresentational theory develops and substantiates the tension between subjective/objective, engaging with ways of seeing and interacting within the landscape and working within and between sensitive material entities and processes.

A key advocate in leading this turn towards a poststructuralist perspective, and more specifically, a nuanced phenomenological engagement with the landscape, is the anthropologist Tim Ingold. His seminal work *The Perception of the Environment* (2000[1993]) explores the underlying rhythms, flows and practices within the landscape. Following the phenomenological tradition which challenges the Cartesian divide, Ingold is able to create an account of landscape where the self is inseparable from its embodiment, and embodiment becomes the very basis of experience. By doing this, a relational ontology is devised where “body and landscape are complementary terms: each implies the other, alternately as figure and ground” (Ingold, 2000:193). In this way subjectivity and objectivity become indistinguishable from one another; it is a relational ontology developed through Merleau-Ponty’s theory of *reversibility*. In this guise the body becomes understood as *both* subject and object, i.e. seen and seer, touched and toucher; it is “an ongoing milieu of folding and unfolding, intertwining and diverging *from which* subjectivity and meaning emerges” (Wylie, 2002a:445).

Once this notion of *reversibility* is in place, there is in effect, no possible way of distinguishing between the material and discursive world. The landscape becomes known through its very performance and enactment; it is a world constructed via a patterning of interaction and practical activity. It is devised through complex, dynamic and emergent material processes of organic and inorganic textures, natural and manmade elements; it is elucidated via a language of biology, psychology and philosophy. This is a landscape and world understood through its being inhabited, through *building, dwelling, living*.

In developing these ideas Ingold turns to adopt a Heideggerian language to manipulate and form a *dwelling perspective* based within and around the idea of reversibility. He suggests that

to dwell is to be, and dwelling becomes the very means by which all these elements, natural and manmade, organic and non-organic, are immersed in the world. From this perspective, the landscape "becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it" (pp.191); we become "a being immersed from the start... in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with the constituents of the dwelt-in world" (Ingold, 2000:42). The 'elements' within this dwelt-in-world, contrary to the defining structures within the New Cultural perspective, remain elusive to precise definitions in either stable or fixed terms, and are inclusive of nature, environment *and* living matter. It is a world of rhythms and fluxes which constantly develop and dilate through encounters and interactions, it is a world where "the activities of dwelling are primary and incessant" (Wylie, 2007a:159).

These ideas of *dwelling* and *being-in-the-world* have been taken up and used in conjunction with geographic thought, mainly through the work of Nigel Thrift (1996, 1997, 1999). Through a vocabulary of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Wittgenstein amongst notable others, Thrift furthered the basis of Ingold's nuanced form of phenomenology, continuing the line of thought on embodied practice and performance. Through a sequence of publications (1996, 1997, 1999) Thrift continued to assert a criticism of the constructivist epistemology of 'new' cultural geographies (Wylie, 2007a:163), slowly working to subvert Cartesian intellectualism through an attention to "situated, pre-linguistic, embodied states that give intelligibility (but, not necessarily meaning) to human action" (Thrift, 1996:9). This new and sustained interest in *practice, subject, agency and context* (Thrift, 1997:1-3) lends itself to attending to the 'more-than-representational' aspects of life (as Lorimer (2005) puts it). Here, thinking is no longer grounded in 'concepts' but rather it is understood in terms of habitual, everyday practice. It is an engaged agency where human beings are no longer seen as isolated and disengaged subjects who represent objects in themselves, but instead, considers the world through the ways in which subject-object fuse in their *mode of comportments*; "a skilful coping which consists of a shared readiness to deal 'appropriately' with people and things" (Thrift, 1996:11). It is an understanding of the world which works to detail the movements, functions and feelings, that is, the *practices* which make up the more noticeable and grander scale events.

Having delineated the preliminary movements within the development of nonrepresentational thought, I now intend to flesh out and give background to the six main components of these 'theories of practice' as expounded by Thrift (1996:7). These theories are both integral to the development of nonrepresentational theory, and, as such, are also hugely consequential for the development of landscape studies. The first then, is fairly banal, commenting upon the inability to re-present a naturally present reality, hence instead we are called to consider the practices which form our sense of the real. Secondly, and directly related to this, we are asked to concern ourselves with "thought-in-action, with presentation rather than representation" (pp.7).

Such a valorisation of thought-in-action emphasises 'particular moments', which leads directly to the third point; the recognition that the act of representation is, in itself, a presencing practice.

The next two theories of practice work as a direct critique of New Cultural methods of analysis, and as such, attempt to overturn the dominance of the static, visual conception of the world, instead placing emphasis upon the importance of *all* the senses. It demands a need for multifarious, open encounters, not just in terms of the visual but across the whole sensual domain. This critique is extended from not just the implicit reliance laid upon the visual, but also that placed upon language and text which "has often cut us off from much that is most interesting about human practices, most especially their embodied and situated nature" (1996:7). Finally, the sixth theory of practice contains undertones of the preceding five, and within it, Thrift, drawing from Wittgenstein (1957), emphasises that the theory of practice isn't so much a form of empiricism as it is a form of 'realism'. By this, Thrift recognises the impossibility of adequately representing relations to the possible; it is an unavowed acknowledgement to the singularity of experience. This, alongside the former five theories, creates an understanding of self and world through an embedded and embodied approach. It is a notion which does not rely upon overbearing ideologies and 'representative' structures, rather, it is inclusive of other broader processes of knowledging where understanding is accumulated through embedded practice.

Overall, it can be seen that once Thrift's 'theories of practice' are integrated with Ingold's 'perception of the environment', there are direct implications for the way in which landscape becomes understood within social and cultural geography. It allows for substantive shift to occur, moving geography, and in particular landscape studies, from a discipline based upon analysing *representations* to one focussed upon *performance*. From this, a decisively phenomenological understanding of the landscape comes about, defined primarily in terms of embodied practices of dwelling; "practices of being-in-the-world in which self and landscape are entwined and emergent" (Wylie, 2007a:14). This notion developed through the continued emergence of nonrepresentational thought, continually affirms the 'lived' experience of landscape often within the realm of the everyday (Lorimer, 2005). It is "an ontology which works through things rather than imposes itself upon them from outside or above" (Brennan, 1993, cited in Thrift, 1999:302). Crucially, this spells out the onset of nonrepresentational thought; it is the beginning of a systematic move from considering landscape as a representation to be analysed through consistent inscriptive mechanisms, to one, once more understood through the actual goings-on and embodiment, through the "excessive and transient aspects of living" (Lorimer, 2005:83).

### **Nonrepresentational theory**

Having acknowledged Thrift's 'pivotal role' in developing the idea of nonrepresentational theory, and the influences of both phenomenology and Ingold's manipulation of the dwelling

perspective, I will now turn to summarise how these have, in turn, been utilised and adapted within geography. This section will roughly be divided in three; in the first part I will explore the main works which lay out the theoretical basis of nonrepresentational theory. As Lorimer (2007:90) notes, "the fortunes of NRT seem still pinned closely to the output of certain spokespeople", and so, I will depict and discuss the main thematic threads common across these seminal accounts. The second section will discuss and review some of the emergent literature based upon nonrepresentational accounts of landscape. In particular it will look at the various ways in which these accounts have opened up and examined the landscape through a nonrepresentational account of self and subjectivity brought about through their embodiment and practice of landscape through a range of diverse activities. Finally, the last part of this section will move on to discuss how these themes have been taken up and used within landscape studies, particularly through the work of Lorimer (2003a, b, 2006), Rose (2002, 2006, 2007) and Wylie (2005, 2006a) whose output has specifically developed within a more phenomenological landscape-based framework of nonrepresentational theory.

Important to note at this point is that although nonrepresentational theory forms the basis for this literature review and subsequently provides the framework for the following chapters, it is by no means the only output of landscape literature. Critiques of New Cultural Geography have also developed, as mentioned earlier, through uptake of poststructural philosophies, which, like nonrepresentational accounts focus upon practise of the landscape, particularly in relation to 'everyday' activities. These lines of development have sought continued emphasis upon critical interpretation of the landscape through both visual and textual discourse, foregrounding notions of subjectivity, power, representation and visibility, termed through the *cultural production* of landscape; most notable across the work of David Matless (1995, 1996, 1998). Further developments, whilst still reliant on critical interpretation try to capture more *mobile* understandings of landscape, asserting that values, beliefs and 'ways of seeing' may be used across a range of times *and* landscapes. W.J.T. Mitchell ([1994]2000) is perhaps the most influential of writers in this field, spurring a proliferation of narratives around imperial and post-colonial landscapes of both European and non-European landscapes (McEwan, 1996; Ryan, 1997; Martins, 2000; Myers, 2002; Scott, 2006). Other lines along which this theme is taken up is through the dominance of the Western gaze over science (Pratt, 1992), exploratory missions (Ryan, 1997) and cartography (Clayton, 2000). Development within this theoretical framework also revolves around ideas of 'mobility' in terms of travel, tourism and identity (Urry, 1990; McNaughten & Urry, 1998; Darby, 2000; P. Anderson, 2001; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Finally, and perhaps most pertinent to this work, is the wealth of writing that has become attentive to issues of memory, landscape and politics of memory. This work seeks to develop and substantiate how landscapes function as memorial heritage sites, asserting the memory of 'popular' culture. This work adopts motifs and themes of



social transformation and justice from Marxist geographies of North America, and offers an alternative departure for landscape studies from NCG. Key publications on this topic are Withers (1996), DeLyser (1999; 2001; 2003), Tolia-Kelly (2004) and Till (2005).

However, whilst necessary to acknowledge some of the multiple divergent lines spanning from critiques and developments of New Cultural Geography, *this* research remains explicitly reliant upon the nonrepresentational conception of landscape, and so, I shall return once more to the exposition of the work within this field.

#### **i. emergent theories**

The main advocates of nonrepresentational theory in geography are generally noted as Anderson, Harrison, Lorimer, Wylie, McCormack, Rose, Dewsbury and Thrift<sup>3</sup>. However, due to the sheer amount of literature produced by this grouping, it is not my ambition to unravel the inner workings of each and every publication. Rather, I will draw out the main themes which have been explored through their efforts to expound nonrepresentational theory into the wider domain of geography and the social sciences. Indeed, the touchstone when discussing nonrepresentational theory, is written by an amalgam of these academics; Dewsbury *et al.*'s (2002) introduction to the special edition of *Geoforum: enacting geographies* has become a somewhat cardinal citation. As such, this paper will form the basis for this section where I will create an exposition of the main themes within nonrepresentational theory. Following the style of Thrift, I will lay out the main tenets in a synchronic style, and add further commentary and illustration taken from work of the main advocates.

What is nonrepresentational theory then? Firstly, nonrepresentational theory, as already discussed, is about practices; the mundane, banal and ordinary everyday practices. It is a focus which falls upon how life takes shape, both in the conduct of the individual towards others and towards themselves. It provides a forum for the otherwise almost imperceptible actions; allowing us to know "how things are because of what we did to bring them about" (Radley, 1995, cited in Thrift, 1997:126). As such, it is practical rather than cogitative view, assessing and bringing to present the more mundane qualities of life which operate as singularities. It asserts an emphasis upon embodiment, making seen the unseen, it is "the unthought in thought [which] revolves around embodiment" (Harrison, 2000:497); it is the spontaneous instances and practices which matter most. "Shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions" (Lorimer, 2005:84).

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<sup>3</sup> The full references are as follows: Anderson 2004a, 2006; Anderson & Harrison, 2006; Dewsbury, 2000; Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002; Harrison, 2000, 2002, 2007a, 2008, *forthcoming*; Lorimer, 2003a,b, 2006; McCormack, 2002, 2003, 2005; Rose, 2002; 2006; 2007; Thrift, 2004, 2008; Wylie, 2002a, b, 2005, 2006a, b; Wylie & Rose, 2006.

Secondly, nonrepresentational theory is concerned with “practices of subjectification (note the crucial ‘ion’), not with the subject” (Thrift, 1997:217). This has a series of implications; firstly, the subject becomes radically decentred; the subject merges into the world through the “interlocking organic and inorganic rhythms and the interleaving of these with a consideration of various human activities as they cohere through and across these rhythms” (Harrison, *forthcoming* on Ingold, 2000). Here, it is no longer necessary, or indeed possible, to think or speak of person-and-world in terms of ‘subject’ and ‘object’, rather they become melded as one through their very practice and embodiment; “in the performances that make us, the world comes about” (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002:439). Hence, despite this decentring of subject, but rather *because of it*, the subject is embodied. It is an embodiment which is tactile and sensual; “landscape and subject are, thus, ontologically (or ontogenetically) rather than simply ontically (sociologically) constitutive. They come into being, as forms of presence, through physical, tactile and sensory processes” (Rose, 2006:538). This leads to a third implication of the practice of ‘subjectification’; that is, the affective and affectual nature of the subject. “Affects are not about *you* or *it*, subject or object. They are relations that inspire the world... they are that through which subject and object emerge and become possible, they speak to the emergent eventuality of the world” (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002:439). Such a notion of affect and percept leads to the final implication related to subjectification, that is, the embodied affective *dialogical* practices, born into and out of *joint action* (Thrift, 1997:128). In a world where there is an emphasis upon the emergent nature of relations, subjectivity arises through a relational ontology where actions arise as seemingly inconsequential, spontaneous and unselfconscious responses. To consider such responses leads to a reliance not solely upon past forms of expression, but rather “call upon us to open up the spaces between words, towards and awareness of a distributed agency” (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002:439), to embrace the unseen, affectual and affective world around us.

Third, and finally, nonrepresentational theory is “always everywhere spatial and temporal” (Thrift, 1997:129). The world does not resolve or come to rest, it is always emergent; “ideas, things, animals, humans; all bear the same ontological status” (Thrift, 1997:132). Assuming this, alongside the practices of subjectification which I previously discussed, the world becomes apparent through its constantly proliferating relational ontology. Significance is understood through interactions, conscious or otherwise, which occur through a continuous cycle of complex, dynamic and emergent processes. To best summarise this ‘nonrepresentational’ conception of world, I will borrow a seemingly benign line from Harrison; “everyday life should be understood in terms of enaction and immanence” (2000:497). Whilst this is a potentially throw away comment, it is one which is inclusive of the main themes of nonrepresentational theory; practice, subjectivity, agency and context.

## **ii. nonrepresentational accounts**

Following the initial advent of nonrepresentational theory there was a proliferation of research accounts detailing series of habitual events and actions, each delineating personal versions and embodiments of the various activities. Most notably, the theme of dancing dominated original discussions, see for instance Thrift (1997), McCormack (2002, 2003, 2005), Revill (2004) and Saldanha (2005). Following on from these, geography has seen a continued proliferation of narratives developing around a significant range of activities, for instance, gardening (Crouch, 2003; DeSilvey, 2003), cycling (Jones, 2005; Spinney, 2006), walking (Edensor, 2000; Wylie, 2002a, 2005; Morris, 2004; *Cultural Geographies* special issue, 2005), production of artwork (Rycroft, 2005) and so on and so forth. There are recurrent themes which run throughout the majority of these accounts, most notably they are mainly presented within a narrative style delineating habitual and visceral accounts of subjectification. They all detail “snippets of action, aura and atmosphere” (Lorimer, 2008:552) depicting just some of the ways in which life takes place with affect in its midst, or indeed, how life is composed in the midst of affects. They are all practical accounts of how life unfolds, each preserved, assembled and re-created through various formats, detailing and playing out trans-subjective experiences. The texts are dense, and often include diagrams, photographs and images of experience as it unfolds in both unexpected and normative manners.

Through these means the accounts offer great promise of making the unseen moments seen, drawing out the invisible and offering narratives upon encounters of normally imperceptible elements. And whilst it is possible to deduce a series of common themes which run throughout nonrepresentational accounts, there is no set of instructions or prescription for how these narratives ought to be constructed. In many ways, themes of creativity and experimentation feature strongly throughout the literature. Methods of montage, collections and partially fragmented accounts constantly work to play out active sketches, allowing us to know “how things are because of what we did to bring them about” (Radley, 1995, cited in Thrift, 1997:126). For some, such as Lorimer (by self confession), “nonrepresentational theory works best as a background hum, asking questions of style form, technique and method, and ushering in experimental kinds of response” (2008:556). It is impossible to delineate a standard for formatting and producing nonrepresentational account, indeed, in true Deleuzian style, “there are no correct ideas – just ideas; pas d’idées justes, justes des idées” (1977:7).

## **iii. the nonrepresentational landscape**

As has been ably demonstrated, nonrepresentational theory offers a theoretical framework which acknowledges excessiveness and constant proliferation of the world. As a theory, it is *always already* practical, and as such, does not work to represent the world, or indeed to explain it, but rather hopes to consider and offer various ways in which it is possible to research and write within

it (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002). Nonrepresentational theory then, has led to new and exploratory accounts of landscape, as Wylie (2007a:206) notes, “there has been a renewed sense of a need to develop newly critical and creative means of expressing relationships between biography, history, culture and landscape”. This section of the literature review hopes to explore some of the ways in which the task of creative landscape writing has been taken up within contemporary cultural geography. In particular, it will focus upon a selection of the publications by the three leading advocates of nonrepresentational accounts of landscape; Lorimer (2003a, b, 2006), Rose (2002, 2006, 2007) and Wylie (2005, 2006a)<sup>4</sup>. I have specifically chosen to review these accounts as not only are they explicitly based upon narratives *in* and *of* the landscape, they all also work within a slightly nuanced more-phenomenologically based accounts of a landscape set within a broader nonrepresentational framework.

Firstly, I will detail Lorimer’s approach to the landscape in the form of a ‘geographical-historiography’. Throughout his series of papers on landscape (2003a, b, 2006) Lorimer seeks to “assemble, preserve and recreate” (2003a:199) the historical landscape of Highland Scotland, emphasising both the mundane and particularities. Through his ‘small story’ approach to landscape narratives, Lorimer attempts, through use of ‘active subjects of the narrative’, to emphasise and acknowledge the influence of minor figures within the “greater intellectual histories of geography” (2003a:199). By using this almost hermeneutic approach for engaging with the landscape informed and illustrated by these ‘small stories’, Lorimer works to directly subvert and challenge the dominant linear temporal sequences which dominate the local history of the Highland landscape.

Lorimer’s less-than-conventional mode of encountering landscape through a fusion of memoir, empiricism and storytelling-around-movement, opens up and demonstrates the various possibilities for engaging with landscape. The field itself presents a “creative and continuous circulation of knowledge producing relations” (Lorimer, 2003b:282). Lorimer’s focus, in true nonrepresentational style, rests upon ‘lives lived’, biography and narrative, which, according to Wylie (2007a:210) becomes a *leitmotif* for his landscape writing. As such, it tells of an engagement within the landscape which allows otherwise disparate entities to be brought together, and exposes various ways in which knowledge, land and life are entwined, revealing the complexity of the sites themselves, and allowing the landscape to occur through a montage of different embodiments, practices, motions and flows.

Following this brief exposition of Lorimer’s work on landscape, I will now turn to look at the work of Mitch Rose (2002, 2006, 2007). I have roughly divided this exploration of Rose’s work into two sections; the first will broadly define his philosophical rationale which he pursues within

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<sup>4</sup> These are by no way the only output of these authors on landscape; they are however the publications which have had the most influence upon my nonrepresentational understanding of the landscape and also are the ones which are most pertinent to the rest of this thesis.

his landscape writing, and will mainly draw from *Landscape and Labyrinths* (2002) and the first part of *Dreams of Presence* (2006). The second section will divulge his more recent work which has both continued to develop a critique of constructivism, whilst also increasingly adopting a deconstructive approach, which is based far more upon welcoming elements of the unexpected into the political landscape.

Rose's approach to the landscape then (2002, 2006, 2007) takes on a slightly different slant from that of Lorimer. Whilst still exploring the interrelation of landscape and movement, he does so not in terms of entwined narratives and telling of 'small stories' but rather through a more direct critique of the overriding structuralist categories which still dominate the contemporary North American analysis of landscape. Overriding categories such as 'culture', 'identity' and 'power' are juxtaposed and jar up against the otherwise predominantly poststructuralist conceptions of landscape analysis (Wylie, 2007a:212). Rose works to challenge these overriding structures through a call for more empirical and nonrepresentational accounts of the landscape, through critiques of Duncan & Duncan (1988, 2001), Cresswell (1996), Moore (1997) and Crump (1999) amongst others. In doing so, he demonstrates that although 'culture' is prescribed within contemporary American geography as something which is open to change and resistance, and considered a fluid, performed and practiced entity, the very act of defining it within the landscape still comes about through a structural-humanist epistemology of 'adding-up' diverse and eclectic processes within the landscape. Such a notion of 'itemising' certain practices in order to deduce 'culture' leads Rose to question whether this is in fact any different to the structuralism; "although cultural studies has potentially made its concept of culture more human and thus, better attuned to the vagaries of the idiosyncratic and the everyday, it has not necessarily made the concept less structured" (2006:541). With this in mind, Rose considers whether a 'theory of culture' is actually needed to engage with the landscape; such a static concept inherited from the New Cultural movement merely acts as a deadening effect, which is precisely the type limitation that nonrepresentational theory seeks to challenge. And so, in response to this, Rose proposes that we approach and explore the landscape "as a thing in itself: that is, as something that solicits and provokes, initiates and connects, as something that engenders its own effects and affects" (2006:542).

To follow such an approach to landscape however, demarcates an adoption of deconstructive methods, which, as Rose reminds us, are always already working within the landscape (2006:537). The use of deconstruction is taken up under the guise of the motif '*dreams of presence*' which recognises the impossible possibilities within the landscape. This motif is used both as a continued critique of constructivism and is also taken up as a means to "explore the ways in which enduring and imaginatively compelling ideas of landscape and self are cultivated" (Wylie, 2007a:212). Landscape in this guise is understood as an ambiguity, open to the unexpected, it is a consequence of potential practices which may come about through an investment in the resources it

provides (Rose, 2007). Hence, in this way, landscape works through *dreams of presence* in an “incessant, nurturing or caring movement-process in which the world is imagined as whole and coherent” (Wylie, 2007a:212). Working to deconstruct the landscape through the form of *dreams of presence* highlights the potential for engaging with both landscape *and* nonrepresentational theory in new ways. In particular, Rose suggests that the use of deconstruction and the ‘call to care’ shows the possibility of further theorising nonrepresentational theory through alternate philosophies other than just the phenomenological and Deleuzian thought which is already implicit within the theory. Succinct within this notion implies a use of *both* a phenomenological understanding of the landscape *and* the use of poststructural philosophies which allow an “understanding of selfhood as contingent, fractured, multiple and in various ways historically and culturally constituted” (Wylie, 2007a:214).

Following along these same post-phenomenologically informed lines, and often presented through an emergent montage of theoretical, methodological and geographical argument, Wylie offers another alternative conception of landscape. Of the three landscape writers (Wylie/Rose/Lorimer), Wylie is the most prolific (2002a, b, 2005, 2006a, b, 2007a, b): Most notably, his recent book entitled *Landscape* (2007a) reviews and examines the lineage of landscape studies over the past century. In particular, Wylie focuses upon the philosophical and political underpinnings of the various accounts and approaches to landscape, concluding with a forward-looking synthesis which invites the reader to continue reading, theorising and writing in new and inventive ways *in* and *of* the landscape. I do not intend to expound this sequential vision of landscape any more than this review has already managed to touch upon, instead, I will discuss Wylie’s ‘geopoetics’ (Lorimer, 2007:90) through a discussion of *A Single Day’s Walking* (2006) and *Depths and Folds* (2006) which together work through the idea of landscape as a ‘tension’, and as “that *with which* we see, the creative tension of self and world” (Wylie, 2007a:217).

*Depths and Folds: on landscape and the gazing subject* (2006) offers a post-phenomenological critique of New Cultural Geography’s ‘gaze’ upon the landscape. Via an extended version of Merleau-Ponty’s embodied ontology, which incorporates elements of Deleuze’s philosophy of ‘the fold’, Wylie proposes an account of gazing which is no longer from ‘outside’ or ‘above’ as it was in New Cultural Geography, but rather as “an eventful actualisation and distribution of selves and landscape, through attending to the depths and folds of an immanent plane” (Wylie, 2006a:519). Through this means, looking becomes the medium via which landscape and self, materialities and sensibilities are actualised; it is a method of subjectification where landscape is no longer judged or contingent upon the empirical content, nor upon the cultural construct: “Landscape belongs to neither object nor subject; in fact, it adheres within processes that subtend and afford these terms” (Wylie, 2006a:520). Landscape then, is best understood as the “entwined materialities and sensibilities *with which* we act and sense” (Wylie, 2005:245), and as such, Wylie suggests that

geographies of self and landscape ought to be understood through the distinct series of “emergences, affinities and distanciations” (2005:245).

*A Single Day's Walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path* (2005) takes up these themes and details the sequence of events through a form of spectral narrative and creative writing interspersed with photographs detailing the continual passing-through the landscape. Through a nuanced nonrepresentational form, the paper lays out the preliminary framework for understanding the joint evolution of landscape-and-self. The account is also inclusive of certain theoretical moments which come about through epiphanies, triggered by unexpected events and incidents encountered in the landscape. These encounters demonstrate the inherent ‘unknowability’ and unexpected nature of the landscape, detailing instances which may only be experienced when touching upon “the ‘event of events’,” and during “the taking-place of the empirical” (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002:439). In common with Rose, Wylie manipulates *both* a phenomenological understanding of the landscape *and* the use of poststructural philosophies to create a unique and contingent understanding of selfhood within and throughout each distinctive landscape.

Notable across all of these accounts of landscape, are the series of empirical moments upon which each of the papers rests. By using these, the authors create *presentations*, and as such they touch upon and “partake of the ‘stretch of expressions in the world’” (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002:439). In some ways, such use of empirical material harps back to the start of landscape studies as defined by the Old Cultural School. As Lorimer (2003a) notes, this turn to the ‘field’ is of no coincidence given the traditional development of geography as a ‘discipline of the empire’ to “capture data from a world ‘out there’” (pp.201). However, we are reminded that these ‘captured’ empirical moments cannot be treated as discrete representations to form an applicable model of discursive realism; instead, such empirical moments are understood through a *relational* ontology, where each operates as a singularity depicting a distinct landscape. Every one of these accounts tries to offer a narrative of these singular goings-on, and communicates, through trans-subjective experiences, the basis of embodiment and landscape at a practical and personal level. Together, they offer and demonstrate a post-phenomenological account of landscape through their relational ontology of embodiment; which emphasises the emergent and unexpected ways in which landscape and subjectivity may come about through material and affectual encounters.

### **From here**

As has been shown, nonrepresentational theory has been integral to changing the face of landscape studies. In particular, it has demanded new ways of expressing the relational ontology which engulfs and defines the world, calling for methods of writing which are both *in* and *of* the

landscape, and which are, in themselves, performances which are open to the unexpected. Nonrepresentational theory has allowed for a tactile and sensual embodiment of landscape “involving an active grip on the world” (Thrift, 1997:128). It has answered the call to make the *dead geographies* of New Cultural Geography ‘live’ again (Dewsbury & Thrift, 2000). And, through a proliferation of narratives and accounts of everyday action and embodiment, it has ‘enlivened’ the world, giving precedence to lived experiences and materialities, telling of just some of the action which goes into the creation of how things are within the landscape. However, for all this undoubted promise of making the unseen moments seen, drawing out the otherwise invisible transitory actions and offering narratives upon encounters of normally imperceptible events, there remains a slight-shortcoming within nonrepresentational accounts. My concern arises directly from the absence of absence within nonrepresentational theory; within the accounts there are very few recognitions of, or even spaces for loss and movements to and from absence. This is a charge levelled at NRT *because* of its constant priority of action, intention, embodiment and practice, which have led, in my understanding, to narratives of the world which are devoid and unreceptive to the circulating absences which occur, rupture and disrupt our everyday landscape.

If nonrepresentational theory is to be true to its rationale, where practice forms its central pillar, and embodiment is “*the inescapable medium in which sense is made and subjectivity performed*” (Wylie, 2007a:165, paraphrasing Harrison, 2000), then this embodiment and relational ontology *must* also be inclusive of absence. Of course I am not the first to have raised concerns about the “busyness” of these ‘more-than-representational’ accounts of the world. Harrison (2007a, 2008, *forthcoming*), Bissell (2008) and Anderson (2006) have all responded to this absence of absence through various means, whether in terms of the nonrelational, passivity or plenitude. Similarly, the recent proliferation of work on spatial hauntings and hauntology (see Wylie, 2007b and *Cultural Geographies* special edition on *spectro-geographies*, 2008), on ruins (Edensor, 2001; 2005a, b) and decay (DeSilvey, 2006; Trigg, 2006) suggests that absence is coming to the fore in more nuanced forms within nonrepresentational theory and narratives.

As such, it can be said that absence is slowly being admitted into nonrepresentational theory. And so, building upon these contemporary narratives, I aim to differentiate between the various forms of absence, and through a process of formalisation and multiplication, I aim to suggest ways in which landscape can become even more receptive and open to absence. Indeed, this literature review on landscape has tried to provide a solid basis and exposition of the theoretical grounding upon which current conceptions of landscape in social and cultural geography rest. Working from these, within the bounds of a nonrepresentational and a post-phenomenological informed approach to landscape, I will further problematise absence before delineating and developing various typologies which will allow for more experimental accounts of



landscape, which are hopefully more fluid and credible, and inclusive of the absences which occur in and of landscape.

### III Typologies of Absence

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.000<sup>5</sup> This chapter will open out and develop almost exclusively from the final point of the preceding chapter; that is, the problem of the 'absence of absence' within nonrepresentational theory. In this chapter, I will consider the problem of absence, its differentiations and multiplications within the landscape, and critique contemporary landscape narratives which defer and ignore absences in preference of 'action', 'doings' and 'becomings'. Only recently was I reading the recent publication of the 2006 RGS session on *Landscape, mobility, practice* (2008) and within the twenty-one page transcript of what presumably was a session spanning the whole afternoon, absence was only mentioned a handful of times, and only twice directly in relation to 'landscape' (see Merriman *et al.*, 2008:202-203).
- 1.001 Yet despite this seeming 'absence of absence', the past two years has seen wider developments along the same line of critique leading to developments which rectify, to some degree, the problem in hand; namely through the work of Harrison (2007a, 2008) using the vehicle of the 'nonrelational', Bissell (2008) through the notion of excess passivity and Anderson (2006) who examines the constant proliferation and plenitude of affect. Notably, all these accounts differ substantially in their critiques of nonrepresentational theory, and as such, their subsequent suggestions for the development of the theory also differ.
- 1.002 Whilst disturbances and developments in this field are particularly encouraging for the possibilities of admitting absence into nonrepresentational theory, none of the critiques develop with an explicit orientation towards landscape. As such, vital questions remain over what the implications and repercussions of these developments for landscape studies are. Secondly, the three critiques offer substantially different outlooks on how their specific forms of absence, whether in terms of the nonrelational, passivity, the unspeakable and so forth, may be rectified and admitted into the relational ontology of nonrepresentational theory. The challenge then lies within the manipulation of these ideas, to develop methods and techniques which will admit them into landscape narratives. The key to this, I believe, lies in the differentiation and subtleties, the nuances and complexities which are within and between each of these conceptions of absence. Hence, this will form the point of departure for this chapter, before turning to develop and multiply these themes throughout the rest of this chapter and subsequent chapters.

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<sup>5</sup> This section at first glance may appear to inhibit the flow of the rest of the thesis; the numbering however is a direct result of engaging with Adi Ophir's *The Order of Evils* (2005). The enumeration in and of itself is merely a set of symbols, a basis for counting, typologising and determining order. Throughout the chapter, specificities and general patterns emerge both within the numbers and content; they distinguish what is there and what is not. Most importantly, whilst the numbering is linear in its general form, it works through interrupted association. The sections which are explicitly present and numbered are countered against and ruptured by those which remain elusive and unwritten.

## 2.0 The absence of absence

- 2.000 One of the broad underlying rationales of nonrepresentational theory is based around the need to move away from the “false and unsustainable” divisions instigated by New Cultural Geographies (Thrift, 1999:301). Yet despite this, the performative turn and subsequently also nonrepresentational theory, continually affirm the division of presence/absence through a constant spelling out of action and negation of all narratives marked or incised by absences.
- 2.001 Nonrepresentational theory in itself gives undoubted promise to making seen the unseen moments of practice which go into making the world come about as we know it. It draws out multiple, otherwise invisible transitory actions, offering narratives on normally imperceptible events through a continually extending vocabulary which is attentive to the finer affective and affecting moments (McCormack, 2002, 2003; Thrift, 2003; Anderson, 2006). Yet it pays little attention to the moments when body and world are *not* in action, when performances are disturbed or when the world is fragmented and not running quite as a seamlessly as it could. There is a constant propagation of all things present, a language of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’, where an incessant affirmative spin is placed upon every movement and event; from the large scale earth shattering phenomena with repercussions stretching the whole length of the globe (Zournazi, 2002; Ó Tuathail, 2003; Miyazaki, 2004) to the miniscule private and individual moments (Crouch, 2003; DeSilvey, 2003; Lorimer, 2003 a, b). It depicts a landscape bound in continuous, proliferating movements of excess.
- 2.002 My charge then is gauged at the ‘absence of absence’; it is levelled at nonrepresentational theory *because* of its constant priority of action, intention, embodiment and practice. It is a prioritisation, which has, in my understanding, led to narratives which are devoid and unreceptive to the multiple circulating absences which are ubiquitous within landscape. Understandably, this prioritisation of action is due to the underlying logic of a relational ontology, where any action *always already* spurs a series of other actions releasing new potentialities and possibilities. My question then, is why do these narratives avoid *movements* of absence? Can absences or dissipating presences not also be affected and affecting in the same way as actions? Do slippages, inactivity and loss not occur in as great a frequency as actions and doings?
- 2.003 My second point refers back to the previous comment, but this time it is directed more towards the semantics of a relational ontology. I recognise that under this rationale all disruptions must spur new possibilities and be both affected and affecting; whilst I do not want to draw away from such a productive ontology, I do want to contest the language and vocabulary taken up in relation to absences. Can, or indeed should movements of absence such as disappearance, decay and damage be defined or termed in the same way as say a birth or a rejuvenation? The landscape is not faultless, moments *are* forgotten, intensities may *not* be revoked, stutters and

omissions fragment our tales; so how can contemporary narratives offer such 'tight' and perfect accounts? How can they match up to create perfectly linear threads which trace actions spurring actions, one episode neatly followed by the next? May things not have a chance to ebb away and dissipate into nothingness? To become so decayed or fragmented that they are no longer recognisable within our order?

- 2.004 My third and final point again is related to the previous one: 'May things not have a chance to dissipate into nothingness?' Here, I question the possibility of acknowledging the *absolute* losses within the landscape; current narratives constantly defer questions of loss and disappearance, never so much as trying to engage with the empty traces of past presences which perforate and cut across our landscape. The question I want to raise then, is if such traces, empty or otherwise, are present within our landscape, is it not our imperative to be inclusive of them within our narratives? Even if they may offer no clue of what was there, what it did or where it has gone, should we ignore them? Should present absences not hold a similar gravitas to present presences?
- 2.005 It is important to note at this point, that all the questions I raised here in critique of nonrepresentational theory are done so within the framework of social and cultural geography and are explicitly aligned and orientated towards the nonrepresentational conception of landscape. That is, they are questions over the 'absence of absence' within narratives of landscape, when landscape is conceived as a *seeing-with*, an inter-subjective and dual-ontology of landscape and subjectivity, which comes about through its very praxis.
- 2.010 The question of absence then, is particularly pertinent within nonrepresentational theory. As was mentioned earlier, the past few years have seen a series of developments following this very same line of critique; namely through considerations of passivity (Bissell, 2008), the nonrelational (Harrison, 2007a, 2008) and plenitude (Anderson, 2006, Harrison, *forthcoming*). These critiques, alongside my own, which question the 'absence of absence' emphasise the nuances and complexities of the problem of absence, specifically highlighting the impossibility of finding a singular solution to rectify the problem. As such, I want to suggest that a process of differentiation and formalisation is perhaps the most consistent way to consider the problem of absence. And so to begin this process of differentiation, I will review the current developments which critique the 'absence of absence', engaging first with Bissell's (2008) account of sedentary bodies.
- 2.020 Bissell's account of *comfortable bodies* is a direct critique of the proliferation of research which gives precedence to action over passivity. In particular, Bissell questions the lack of attention paid to how "sedentary bodies are implicated within the dialectic of movement and stillness" (pp.1698). The underlying tone of the paper is one which is inclusive of the "forms of

subjectivity... that are folded through the inactive susceptibilities that are beyond activity" (2008:1697). As Bissell works through and develops this critique in relation to comfort and sitting, he asserts that although the body may be physically still it "may not cease to be moved *affectually*" (pp.1699, my emphasis added).

- 2.021 From the outset then, this account is *inclusive* of passivity, considering the ways in which "new moments and spatialities emerge" from inactive bodies (pp.1697). Throughout, the account is littered with a vocabulary which delineates an absence of activity; for instance 'complacency', a 'lack of sustained effort', 'subsidence' and the lessening of agency associated with passive bodies in comparison to 'agile agentive bodies' (pp.1698).
- 2.022 Through this inclusion of an excess of passivity into the nonrepresentational framework, Bissell is able to engage with the potentialities afforded through encounters with the absence of action. However, important to note here is that the 'comfort' and 'passivity' which are included within the narrative, are done so, not necessarily *over* action but *as well as* action, and as such, in the same way in which action affords and offers potentialities and possibilities, so too does inaction.
- 2.023 My main concern with Bissell's work, for all the promise which such an account of sedentary corporeality offers, is in fact an issue which Bissell himself raises: Throughout the research, sitting as the mode of inactivity is shrouded merely a "background condition" (pp.1703) within the formation of other activities. Similarly, Bissell speaks of the effort it takes to allow for the body to become completely devoid of activity, for instance, the effort it takes to gain a comfortable position where the body always remains active in its 'performance' to be sedentary; "rather than inert, the seated body is constantly refiguring and becoming refigured" (pp. 1704). As such, although it does allow an 'absence' of activity to be submitted into the account, it does not present 'absolute' absence; as 'sitting' is perhaps not sedentary *enough*.
- 2.024 For me rectifying this particular issue is where the very 'problem of absence' begins; how may we be inclusive of moments of inactivity which are *beyond* a mere 'background condition'? The sedentary body would perhaps not be the first place to begin; as even Bissell notes, "the body is never wholly sedentary" (pp.1708), even in moments of 'absolute stillness' the body continues to flux, change and become. The pulsating heart drives blood throughout veins and arteries, the gentle rise and fall of the chest as lungs inflate and deflate, the continual cycle of in- and exhalation to keep the body alive.
- 2.025 Despite these contentious issues, Bissell's consideration of the proliferation of action within landscape is significant. Although he masks passivity as a weak form of action, he does set in motion a consideration of the affective resonances surrounding the sedentary body, engaging with the disruptive potential of absence within a nonrepresentational framework. In doing so, Bissell engages with the possibilities and affordances of inactivity, particularly in terms of the

affectual resonances. However, his account stops short upon encountering what I shall term as the 'problem of absence', that is, the apparent irreducibility of 'absolute' absences into lexical, or indeed, any other comprehensible order. Bissell encounters this 'problem of absence' when considering how sedentary comfort is entwined with both discomfort and even pain; where "to be in pain could be conceptualised as a mode of being-in-the-world, or as the condition of the (potential) loss of that world" (pp.1708). To respond to this 'potential loss' Bissell acknowledges the need for a "new grammar to be developed which is more adequately attuned to narrating corporeal experience" (pp.1709). It is a recognition of the problem of absence, it is the setting up of the need to do more to understand and introduce 'absolute absence' into the nonrepresentational framework.

- 2.100 Harrison's critique of nonrepresentational theory also engages with the 'absence of absence' through the use of the 'nonrelational'. It is a critique which follows a vaguely similar patterning to that of Bissell, considering "where the concern is – and care – for distance, withdrawal and disappearance" (Harrison, 2007a:592). However, it considers and responds to the 'absence of absence' using a very different framework. Bissell concentrates on how absence in the form of passivity may be *incorporated* into the relational ontology of nonrepresentational theory, whereas Harrison considers how it is impossible to capture the excesses which are *outside* the ontology; "stories told, tears shed or shared laughter may never succeed in fully capturing what an individual means, feels and thinks that they mean or feel, thereby opening precisely that (chrono)logical 'interval'" (Laurier & Philo, 2006:355); the 'loses', 'withdrawals', 'tears', 'gaps' and 'caesuras' are the disruptions from *outside*, they are those which set in motion the relational.
- 2.101 From the outset, Harrison states that "any thought or theory of relationality must have as its acknowledged occasion the incessant proximity of the nonrelational" (2007a:590). Indeed, the nonrelational resides in *all* relations; "in the very relating of the relational – at the 'heart' of relationality as it were – abides the absence of the nonrelational as that which silently called for, provoked, and continues to disturb and set in motion the relational" (2007a:592).
- 2.102 Working through this, Harrison details how the nonrelational is particularly important when considering the 'falling-short' of representation and communication; the structure of relational/nonrelational is illustrated most aptly through the problems encountered when trying to render affective moments, such as pain and suffering into testimony. Suffering in itself tends towards the edge of the experiential; it does not "relate or project; it discloses nothing, it apprehends nothing, it gives nothing" (*ibid.*, pp.594). As such, in and of itself, suffering may never be fully grasped or comprehended; it possesses an "irreducible nonthematisability... its singularity and unexchangeability" (pp.596). This presents us with an

aporia, a 'problem of absence'. How best can social scientists work through and around this impasse which lies at the heart of representation? "The act of an imaginative response to suffering is an imperative, however, how in this act are we to avoid effacing the very one we seek to recognise or the very event we seeks to relate?" (pp.596).

- 2.103 This initial account working through the nonrelational offers much in terms of the paradoxes and imperatives which taint and colour our corporeal existence played out within a relational ontology; yet the account in itself leaves a trace of disempowerment: The reader is left staring into the infinite vistas of an impasse, surrounded by looming aporias with no conceivable way of rectifying the *always already* failing accounts of body and world. Whilst this account forces a rethinking of the nature of representation, corporality and intersubjectivity, by what means may we possibly respond – perhaps through a trail of unsatisfactory utterances?
- 2.104 Harrison however does rectify this situation by continuing his line of thought on the nonrelational. He extends and develops the notion through a consideration of corporeal vulnerability, drawing upon the work of Emmanuel Levinas to offer an account of embodiment which has at its origin "not will or intention but the event of corporeal exposure and susceptibility" (2008:432). The corporeal expropriations with which Harrison becomes concerned are precisely the cessation, breakdown or failure of the types of 'productive' activity which are generally considered within nonrepresentational accounts.
- 2.105 "Susceptibility, receptivity, lassitude, exhaustion, and sleep; phenomena which intimate the end of intention and action and which trace a passage of withdrawal from engagement" (pp.424) are central within *Corporeal Remains* (2008). They are moments of corporeal vulnerability which mark the very edge of the experiential in the same way as suffering does; where the ability to comprehend, invoke and summon signification "can and often does fall short" (pp.425). Throughout, there is a 'withdrawal of meaning', a 'break up of comprehension' (pp.425), 'when intention and activity ebb and flow away' (pp.432), and 'the everyday flow of meaning stutters and abates and actions go awry' (pp.424).
- 2.106 The experiential states of indolence and fatigue illustrate incursions of the 'nonrelational' within the world are "not just the inconvenient side effects of action, but rather, that they are inherent within any action from its outset or origin" (pp.235); both fatigue and indolence are held in relation to action, indeed, they are the very conditions of possibility *for* action. As Harrison suggests, drawing directly from Levinas (1947); "fatigue creates the interval in which the event of the present can occur" (2008:235). It is a form of "vulnerability which is sociality antecedent to any identity and recognition" (pp.425).
- 2.107 By thinking through vulnerability in terms of embodiment giving precedence to susceptibility and inaction, movements of withdrawal act to illustrate incursions of the nonrelational into our order. Further, to deal with the concern over the 'falling short' of language, Harrison suggests

a turn towards the relation of *proximity*; “proximity is an attempt to phrase and describe the relation between the self and alterity, between the same and the other, between interior and exterior” (pp.237). As such, proximity gauges an association between anteriority and exteriority, noting they are fundamentally involved and implicated within one another, and as such, a closure of an event or production of interiority “does not bespeak an exclusion but rather a heterological involvement with exteriority” (pp. 238).

- 2.108 As can be seen, Harrison offers an explicit account of how the embodiment may be radically rethought to allow for a consideration of corporeal vulnerability as the basis *from which* action may come about. Harrison contends that “the deep signification of the sensible does not lie with the body-in-action but with its being as flesh, its being susceptible and exposed to that which it cannot contain” (pp.240). This idea of ‘excess’ and being a being exposed to ‘that which it cannot contain’ is directly related to the uptake of affect in nonrepresentational theory (see for instance, McCormack, 2002, 2003; Thrift, 2004; Anderson, 2004a, 2006). Which leads me directly onto the third and final differentiation of critiques of the ‘absence of absence’ within nonrepresentational theory, gauged and considered via the notion of ‘plenitude’.
- 2.200 The notion of ‘plenitude’ resonates strongly as a critique of the ‘absence of absence’ due to the ‘affective excesses’ which saturate the majority of nonrepresentational accounts, constantly affirming social and cultural relations. Anderson (2006) gives an account of the “affective as a realm of processual excess” (pp.738); noting “affects continually manifest themselves in events which can take place either at a grand scale or simply as part of continuing everyday life” (Thrift, 2004:57), as such, they have become central to nonrepresentational accounts of world.
- 2.201 Whilst acknowledging the centrality of the ways in which life takes place with affect in its midst, or indeed, how life is composed in the midst of affects, Anderson is quick to note that “when the continuity of affective escape is put into words, it tends to take on positive connotations” (Massumi, 2002 cited in Anderson, 2006:739). From here, we are alerted to positive and infinitely building nature of affect termed through instances of proliferating excess; “a sphere of plenitude animated by the presence of a continued ‘more’” (pp.740). However, the inherent risk of this *excessive* nature of affect becomes apparent when emergent from forms of life which are deemed ‘negative’, for instance suffering, as such instances tend to be “erased in favour of an affirmative account of the social and cultural” (pp.740). In an aim to rectify this problem, Anderson turns to engage with ‘hope’ as a type of relation which is emergent from encounters of suffering; offering an alternative account which remains open to excesses of affect (pp.741) rather than effacing the initial contexts of despair and grief.
- 2.202 By thinking through the different relations which are termed as ‘hope’, Anderson is able to attend to the relation between absence and presence; where grief or despair rather than being



effaced, are compensated by a hopeful “more-to-come”, indeed, “the condition of defeat is held precariously within itself” (Bloch, 1998, cited in Anderson, pp.742). Where the idea of ‘withdrawal’ held within unfolding action is critical; multiple varieties of diminishments call forth multiple intersecting dispositions and the imperative to hope (pp.744). As such, ‘absence’ termed through desperation becomes part of hope, establishing new relations that “disclose a point of contingency within a space-time” (pp.744). To call on hope is attentive to a double movement of absence; it denotes moments of grievous withdrawal within the world, and is a calling forth of an outside.

- 2.300 As can be seen, these three critiques of the ‘absence of absence’ within nonrepresentational theory offer alternative ways to potentially introduce moments and movements of ‘absence’ to the theory. All three focus upon and work through the notion of ‘excessiveness’ which is inherent within nonrepresentational theory, whether in terms of the proliferation of affect or excessive passivity. Yet, upon reading the three differential accounts, it becomes increasingly clear that the unfolding action of everyday life so carefully documented in the numerous nonrepresentational accounts of body and world (see Chapter II) *always already* hold multiple absences in their midst, whether in terms of the corporeal effort, exertion or fatigue or in terms of emergent hope based on suffering and uncertainty.
- 2.301 A second point of importance which emerges from these accounts is sheer the impossibility of speaking on or of absence in itself. Whilst this point is dealt with explicitly through Harrison’s (2007a) delineation of the nonrelational, it is also evident in Bissell’s account through the incapacity of the body to be sedentary across *all* scales and dimensions. Within Anderson’s account, affective diminishments such as grievance and suffering which give rise to an imperative to hope, again speak of the disruptive potential of *movements* of absence, but not of absolute absence in itself.
- 2.302 Whilst these three accounts all offer critiques and developments in face of this ‘absence of absence’, they do so in relation to corporeality and affect; concepts which perhaps at first glance do not align directly with landscape and landscape narratives. These accounts are important to show the sheer ubiquity and diverse nature of absence both as an interior present absence and also as an exterior driving force. However, in order to relate the idea of the ‘absence of absence’ more explicitly to landscape, I shall turn to three contemporary landscape narratives showing how these ideas pertain, or not, to the landscape as both practised and performed.
- 2.400 Crouch’s (2003) paper on allotment and caravanning culture is an illustration of the type of work which takes up and ‘fleshes out’ theoretical understandings of nonrepresentational theory through both empirical narratives and observed encounters. It offers a direct discussion of the

"accessibility of performance to research investigations" (pp.1945) foregrounding practice and action as definitive modes for comprehending both landscape and self. From the outset, there is an emphasis upon understanding spacing as "positioned in terms of action, making sense and mechanisms of opening up possibilities" (pp.1945). Instantly, it posits an emphasis upon performance through both the content and the explicit reliance upon verbs and doings; "being and becoming; routine activities and everyday creativity" (pp.1945). Throughout the remainder of the account, Crouch considers how these active encounters with the landscape afford multisensual meanings, expressed through movements of "everyday, uneventful things" (pp.1950). There is a constant unfolding of activities; 'gestures', 'mobilities', 'turns' and 'touching', even "habitual performances that fill the time between one task and the next" (pp.1951).

2.401 The article is a plethora of action and embodiment; experience is expressed "through relationships" (pp.1952), intersubjectivity assessed in terms of 'value'; "ideas and doing work together" results in harmonious relations and fruitful harvests from the land. Not once in the account is there mention of disorganisation or disruption; no weeds or blight plague this seamless narrative, there are no slippages, losses or absence. There are however, a few hints at passive practices within this landscape; "resting and just hanging out" (pp.1950-1), "sitting and looking and doing nothing" (pp.1952). However, as Crouch explicitly states, even these fold into an account of embodiment; "'just stand(ing)' is a performative act" (pp.1952). Throughout this account, the dominance of practical performance leads to a landscape shrouded in productive activity; it illustrates admirably the 'absence of absence' within nonrepresentational accounts, yielding no space for an understanding of disappearance and loss to come about.

2.410 Lorimer's *Herding memories of humans and animals* (2006) is an equally embodied nuanced-phenomenological approach to landscape detailing a plenum of activity, however, unlike Crouch this landscape narrative starts from a fragmentary, only partially present collection of empirical moments. Lorimer employs what he labels himself as a 'make-do' methodology of "scattered company", "photographic encounters", "dairies" and "'hidden' ecologies" which are 'salvaged' from the landscape (pp.497).

2.411 Despite the series of gaps which perforate across this initial empirical collection, Lorimer, through "careful animation" (pp.498) creates an 'animal geography' where 'ethnology meets ethnography'. Through the hermeneutic approach to landscape, Lorimer's fragmentary empirical observations allow him to detail the seasons, eating habits, movements, sounds and wanderings of the Cairngorm reindeer herd. Most tellingly this whole landscape narrative rests upon practised action; "unquestionably practical, tactile, and prompted by collective, physiological needs" (pp.502). It is a 'reindeer-geography' pieced together through

'choreographed shows', 'flows' and 'energies', all of which are "initiated by movement" (pp.502).

- 2.412 Lorimer however, does touch upon and recognise certain movements of absence within the landscape; for instance, there is still a need to *sense* meteorological phenomena which are not visible, such as the sweeping winds and localised gusts (pp.502). However, this is a *sensing* of force and movement akin perhaps to the way in which affect is *sensed* yet still remains invisible. As such, it still signifies a "vital energy" which fluxes and moves through the landscape as a presence, even if it not acutely visible.
- 2.413 Other traces of absence and loss ebb throughout the Highland landscape: We are told for instance of 'Kirktek's death' by an "unfortunate accident by the shoreline of the Black Loch" (pp.502). However, even this loss of life is subsumed into and shrouded as positive action; Lorimer suggests that upon the basis of repeated storytelling of Kirktek's unfortunate end, a certain sense of place is established which leads to "afford place some of its most significant qualities" (pp.502). This idea of a loss within the narrative is perhaps not that dissimilar to Bissell's (2008) request to be more inclusive of moments of excess passivity as a way of rectifying the 'absence of absence' in this otherwise 'overfull' account.
- 2.414 Overall, Lorimer's animal-human geography of Highland Scotland is an account which rests predominately upon delineating a series of actions, movements and presences, it is "an animal appreciation of topography, time and movement [that] can be shared by humans" (pp.502). Despite the seemingly fragmentary basis of empirical moments upon which Lorimer builds his research, the overall account is complete in its addressing of the proliferation of sensual engagements with the landscape. Whilst this narrative is hugely promising in offering a thorough account of hybrid human-animal encounters with the landscape, I feel it perhaps does not pay enough attention to the fragmentary basis from which it is built. How can the account be so 'full' and 'tight' in its observations of the herd if it is predominately based upon a series of 'make-do' and 'salvaged' empirical moments?
- 2.420 Wylie's *A single Day's Walking* (2005), unlike the two preceding landscape narratives, is much more receptive to the more elusive nonpresences which are usually inconspicuous by their very absence from accounts of landscape. As such, Wylie's account sets in motion perhaps the beginnings of a nonrepresentational engagement with some of the absences which circulate within and around landscape.
- 2.421 *A Single Day's Walking* at first glance, is not distinctly unlike the other narratives in and of landscape; it is a paper inclusive of "a range of practices – perceptions, memories, physical movements, distanciated topologies.... [which] gather landscape together as a lived *milieu*" (pp.240). In true nonrepresentational style the space and landscape in this account "is a verb

not a noun" (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002:439). As such, the lexis is littered with actions and doings. The pages are teeming with 'movement', 'rhythm', 'mobility'; where 'petulant' and 'productive' action fills the reader with the 'breathless' 'consciousness' as the landscape is depicted as 'crisply alive'. Even silence within the account 'drips' between the emergent branches and trunks of the 'looming' and 'lurking' woodland.

- 2.422 However, for all the actions and unseen, almost imperceptible moments which Wylie makes present within his account, there are also numerous hints and comments which intimate a broader notion of the absences which are folded within the landscape. Certainly, out of all the nonrepresentational accounts of landscape which I have discussed, this is perhaps the one which resonates most with the distinctive timbre of absence. Instances of fatigue and injury creep in; "I was very jarred, tired and footsore" (pp.235), the landscape itself becomes "a perceptual zone of painfulness" (pp.240). Although despite such hints of absence, they remain corporeal instances which are still shrouded within a vocabulary of action. As Wylie notes, his fatigue is played out through a "nervous restlessness" (pp.235) and he is still able to "hobble" despite his blistered foot (pp.240).
- 2.423 Other instances of loss and decay which Wylie encounters are the "abandoned and slowly crumbling grey-stone building" at Mouthmill (pp.239) and the commemoration of *Glenart Castle*, a ship sunk by a torpedo in 1918 just off the coast by Hartland Point (pp.241). Both encounters depict withdrawals and loss from the landscape; they are markers of absence in the otherwise over-full landscape, and both still cause affective resonances despite their decaying and incomplete presences.
- 2.424 Most explicitly however, are the hints of withdrawal away from presence, noted in terms of 'spectral' instances which arise through the very act of walking. The walker, as Wylie notes drawing from Derrida (1994), is always "poised between the country ahead and the country behind, between one step and the next, epiphany and penumbra, he or she is, in other words, spectral... perpetually caught in an apparitional process of arriving/departing" (pp.237). Such a consideration of walking defined through this vocabulary of spectrality already shows an attunement towards and with the nonrelational. As Wylie notes, solitary walking is "always, necessarily, already relational" (2005:245). This relationality achieved through the "continual passing-through" (pp.246) which allows self and landscape to emerge through "entwined materialities and sensibilities" (pp.245).
- 2.425 Implicit within this acknowledgment of relationality of landscape and self is the relation with the 'nonrelational'. As Harrison (2007a) notes, "any thought or theory of relationality must have as its acknowledged occasion the incessant proximity of the nonrelational" (pp.590). As such, to talk of both 'relationality' and 'presence' is also to admit absence into the *milieu* of landscape. Wylie begins to consider this nonrelational absence in the form of the spectral

figure: "It is the revenant: that which is always coming-back. To haunt a landscape is to supplement and disturb it" (Wylie, 2005:246).

- 2.500 As can be seen, whilst the accounts and critiques of Bissell, Harrison and Anderson do touch upon concepts and understandings of the differential ways in which the problem of the absence may be rectified within nonrepresentational theory, they do so in ways which are not perhaps wholly pertinent for landscape. The problem perhaps – and far more so in landscape than in terms of corporeality or affect – is that absences are multifarious and continuously proliferating; they are contingent and specific, and so, whilst they may be recognisable in a particular landscape under one guise, they may be more elusive or perceived differently elsewhere; as a sleeping body, a loss of a loved one, a ghostly apparition, an uncanny aura, a burnt-out buildings and so on and so forth.
- 2.501 One method of drawing out and considering these multiple absences in relation to landscape would be to expand and supplement these three differential accounts of absence encountered in relation to affect and corporeality. Whilst these developments around the 'absence of absence' may not be explicitly related to the landscape, there are some similarities and points of divergence. As mentioned earlier (section 2.301), none of them speak directly *on* or *of* absence in itself, showing that within landscape narratives as well as other nonrepresentational accounts, absence may only be encountered in terms of its movements. Which leads me directly onto the final point;
- 2.502 Absence, termed in relation to its movements may be considered in terms of the tension between absence-presence. As such the movements of absence which may be differentiated between can be considered through their disruptive capacities which afford new possibilities and potentialities. Already, as Wylie suggests (in Merriman *et al.*, 2008:203), landscape works through the tensions of presence-absence "through which subject and object, self and world, find their measure and balance, their coil and their recoil, their proximity and distance", and as such, to create a typology of absences, would be to work through the various ways in which landscape and subjectivity ebb and flux through movements between presence-absence. It would create a proliferation and formalisation of the ways in which these absences could be incorporated into landscape narratives, whether in terms of their interiority, exteriority, materiality or perception.

### 3.0 The problem of absence

- 3.000 What is absence? Absence is a question of definition. Yet it is impossible to regulate, recognise or judge its infinite and elusive qualities.

- 3.001 To propose a definition of absence would be to tie it down, to place it within an ordered realm and to set it in a position where it could always be found and made present. Such an aim however would cause us to efface the very absence of absence, to obliterate its elusive and indeterminate nature, and subsequently annihilate and destroy its intangible and subtle qualities. Hence, instead of trying to circumscribe a set of parameters by which we can determine absence, I propose a series of ways in which absence can be encountered within the landscape. Throughout this section on the 'problem of absence', I will discuss the ways in which movements of absence are both experienced and found within the landscape, laying out just some of the dimensions and forms through which absence permeates and saturates the everyday.
- 3.002 "Look no further than the spaces in this line of text", suggest Game & Metcalfe (2002:48): "Words don't precede the spaces but emerge with them: they *inter-are*. The space is empty but because emptiness is the presence of absence, the space is *full* of emptiness".
- 3.010 Such a notion of '*inter-are*' is paramount when employing the use of a relational ontology to create accounts of landscape and world, which are primarily understood through their practice and as always already being embedded within networks of possible connections and relations. The '*inter-are*' infers already that there is a relation to the nonpresent. That is, the relation with the nonrelational; "simply put... as the hollow gives the essence of a jug, the 'nonrelational' relates to the 'relational'" (Harrison, 2007a:591). And so, if absence and presence are like two sides of the same page, then, in the same way in which we comprehend presences, we must also encounter absence.
- 3.100 What is *an* absence? Absence, termed through its synonyms could be placed as 'elsewhere', 'gone', '*in absentia*'. It is 'inattentive', 'left', 'missing', even 'nonexistent'. It is 'oblivious', 'off' or 'preoccupied'; 'vacant', 'void' or 'withdrawn'. It is an experiential state encountered across multiple dimensions; according to the OED, it is a *being* away from a place; a *time* of being away from a place; a non-existence. It may be understood as an *abstraction* of thought in terms of 'absent mindedness' or as a lack causing a drive and a want-of something.
- 3.101 Absence then is not necessarily a negative value, nor indeed is it a lack of positive value. Rather it is a 'time', a 'being' and an 'abstraction'; it is the insistent and incessant driving force of a lack and want which hints at and sets in motion movements and withdrawals to and from absence.
- 3.200 I propose that absence is composed of three broad dimensions; its *capacity*, its *temporality* and its *affective resonances* which fold into and form the basis for any typology of absence. Firstly, its *capacity* or ontological status relates to the movements of absence which circulate and attach themselves to certain objects, places, people and events within the landscape. Secondly, the

*temporality* of absence acknowledges the presence of absence through a folding and collapsing of linear temporarily, creating a landscape which is dislocated and ruptured, cut across and incised by the multiple and proliferating temporalities of absence. The final constituent, are the *affective resonances* which circulate, imperceptibly driving, supplementing and disrupting the present, creating endless possibilities and potentialities. Together, through these means, these three dimensions of absence work to form an unsettling mixture of present, place, presence and past (Wylie, 2007b).

- 3.201 **Capacity:** Absence then, as has already been mentioned, cannot be considered in and of itself; to speak directly of it would bring it to present and hence efface its otherness. As such, we are left only to consider the *movement* of absence within the landscape; moments of disappearance, decay and loss. These are the disturbances of the absent present; they are the passage *to* or *from* absence, movements and moments of withdrawal and coming to presence. They give the only means by which we may possibly consider absence within the landscape, and as such, I will term these movements the *capacity* of absence.
- 3.202 These do, as perhaps already noted through my uptake of such positive vocabulary, offer affirmative possibilities for landscape and landscape narratives. Why such an affirmative account? Primarily, the *capacity* of absence always already holds within itself the very 'problem of absence', that is, it may not be spoken of, cannot be encountered, touched upon or seen, and as such affords no possibilities within the landscape. Hence, to counteract this aporia, the *capacity* of absence refers to the movements and disruptions caused by incursions of the absent present within our order. This *capacity* of absence is like the concentric circles, slowly dissipating and radiating outwards from an unseen disruption, a swelling of flow resulting in gentle lapping against the shoreline, telling of a now absent and withdrawn presence.
- 3.203 **Temporality:** Second, and related to the *capacity* of absence is the idea the *temporality*. Absence works within folded accounts of temporality; it spells a move away from the causal logic and assumption that time is linear. Instead, it veers towards the notion of a temporality which works across a multiplicity of times, scales, intensities and declensions, each moving at different speeds and even in different directions. It forms the fragmentary and discontinuous quality of absences' *temporality* which is unsettling due to its continuous folding and unfolding, stretching and retraction.
- 3.204 The temporality of absence is one of fleeting moments and encounters, it is a lived and practised time, where insurgences of memory collapse and fold time back its self. It creates pleats and ruches where disparate entities may collide and present new possibilities and potentialities. Moments of the past may be lost within the haze of amnesia yet the *temporality* of absence works through and between these moments of loss; nebulous and incomplete

memories saturated with insufficiency create a present of fractured virtualities; folded, distorted and unsettling.

- 3.205 This *temporality* embraces the Deleuzian concept of the fold, "'abyssally fractured' into future and past, always an unstable becoming" (Crang, 2001:202); "a becoming of velocities, directions, turnings, detours, exits and entries" (Grosz, 1995, cited in Crang, 2001:206). It is a connectedness of future and past, binding them into the present instant and is encountered as it circulates and unfolds within and throughout the landscape. It is an unfolding of hesitancy and uncertainty, ceaseless connection and reconnection with past, present and future. It is a product of the inter-relationships between presence and present, absent and present; sliding, elusive and folded relations which are dynamic and unequal (Thrift & May, 2001:5).
- 3.206 This *temporality* is intrinsic to absence, and works within a synchronous relationship with its *capacity* and *affective resonance*. It is a temporality which laces every landscape and narrative with absence; it is the means by which absence percolates into our everyday lives, as it works "in-between visibility and invisibility, and between observer and observed" (Wylie, 2007b:172).
- 3.207 *Affective Resonances*: Finally, absence also operates and is encountered through *affective resonances*: If absence as a particular sensibility may not be captured, made present, enclosed or objectified in and of itself, then it must be considered through its very *spacing* and circulation in affective terms. Absences' *capacities* and *temporalities* "catalyse complexly and dissipate unexpectedly" (Lorimer, 2008:552); they spark new moods, passions, emotions, intensities and feelings. To consider the affectual resonances of absence then, is to engage with "more-than-human – or trans-human – or post-human... it is distributed between, and can happen outside, bodies which are not exclusively human" (Lorimer, 2008:552, drawing on McCormack, 2006).
- 3.208 The affective resonances of absence, whether in terms of loss or decaying matter, haunting memories or damaged objects provoke a rethinking absence as it is encountered through its traces within the landscape. In turn, affective resonances lead to questions over the emergence of subjectivity determining how absence is engaged with within landscape and landscape narratives. The affective resonances of absence insinuate and imply configurations of "motion and materiality – of light, colour, morphology and mood – *from which* distinctive senses of self and landscape, walker and ground, observer and observed, distil and refract" (Wylie, 2005:236).
- 3.220 As can be seen, absence is very much part of 'what is there' and may be considered through a nexus of these triple dimensions; it is hugely complex and requires continued and sustained attention to the nuances therein. Considering absence through this triple rationale acknowledges the ubiquity of absence *already* within the landscape: As Game & Metcalfe (2002:56) suggest; "I gradually stopped panicking at the presence of nothing, seeing now that things and nothing are intimately and reversible entwined, like life and death, day and night,



sea and shore, and Yin and Yang. Nothingness is not just the absence of things but is also the necessary co-requisite emerging alongside things”.

- 3.221 Derrida’s discussion on presence and absence also affirms that absence is very much a part of ‘what is there’. Throughout this thesis, there are implicit references to Derrida’s discussions which have tainted and become present in themselves via osmosis from personal discussions on the ‘problem of absence’ and from the emphasis current literature places upon Derrida’s writing. Derrida’s critique of the ‘metaphysics of presence’ introduces a play of presence and absence which erases and blurs any binary distinctions placed between the two. Presence and absence are asserted as each other’s consecutive outside; “the expulsion of the other that shapes the self” (Wylie, 2007b:184). The experience of presence is mediated by an absence which is never experienced in and of itself; the absent and present traces become a structuring principle in terms of both spatiality and temporality. This means that any ‘pure presence’ as such is always already permeated and haunted by absence. This notion is implicit to, and played out within the rest of this typology and multiplication of absences within the landscape.

#### 4.0 Typologies of Absence

- 4.000 Following this exposition of the problem of absence, I will formalise, through a development of these dimensions, the proliferation of absence within the landscape. This formalisation will offer two typologies of absence; vaguely formalised through absences within the present, and the resurgence of absence from the past. Within these sections, to illustrate the multiplication of absence, I will delineate three further typologies, ranging from decay to storytelling, disappearance to memory. This typology will lead ultimately into the empirical chapters which again detail and touch upon both these series of absences, as well as multiple others, illustrating the further proliferation of absence within the landscape.
- 4.001 Prior to this however, I will briefly mention the tension of recounting a family history and simultaneously focusing on place; it is a productive relation which allows the unfolding of absence and presence within the narrative. “Landscape is tension” as Wylie & Rose (2006:475) boldly state; “it is productive and precise... the cogency of landscape lies exactly in the creative tensions it threads between such apparent irreconcilables”. These incongruous notions are not only that which is present and absent within the landscape of here and now, but also threading between and throughout the *history* of the landscape: Of that which affected and determined *it*, and which, in turn, *it* affected. This tension then is also the presence and absence of my family history; interlacing and producing, dispossessing, morphing and distorting the landscape. The violence of presencing and losing countless elements of this history both shapes the landscape and subsequently also its narrative; the force of this tension becomes the narrative itself.

4.002 The tension of the specific narratives based upon my family, are contingent upon place, upon Blackpool itself. Blackpool, as a place is neither oneric nor empirical, rather it is fantasmatic; "deriving from a kind of second sight which seems to bear forward to a utopian time, or to carry back to somewhere in myself; a double movement" (Barthes, 1982:40). A double movement more instantly recognisable within moments of *unheimlich*, those uncanny instances experienced within the landscape itself (section 6.206). A double movement of personal history which provides a motif of interest, a *punctum* of detail drawing me to the particular place. "A detail overwhelming the entirety of my reading; an intense mutation of my interest; a fulguration... this *something* has triggered me, has provoked a tiny shock, a *satori*, the passage of a void" (Barthes, 1982:49). It is the tension of the landscape itself; the tautology of family history bound within this place.

## 5.0 Absence within the present

### 5.1 Disappearance

- 5.101 "Disappearance is always of some thing. Some thing that was and is no longer" (Ophir, 2005:41). It is an occurrence which is always in and of an *object*, delineating a movement towards absence; "at the beginning... something is present, and at the end of which it is absent" (Ophir, 2005:41).
- 5.102 To discuss any notion of disappearance is to consider the play of traces within the landscape; it is a way of gauging and giving name to the demise of specific objects, through and by which we may glimpse at and try to understand that which is absent. It allows us, through the movement of these traces, to look at the experiential states of objects and to consider what they were and are no longer; as such the consideration of disappearance within the landscape is predominately a hermeneutic task.
- 5.103 This wake of disappearance illustrated through these ebbing traces etched within the landscape, opens a discussion on what Ophir (2005) terms as "the most abstract concepts of thought, devoid of experience" (pp.41). That is, to consider notions of 'presence' and 'absence' which are situated on the very borderline of the experiential; hence disappearance in itself becomes the means by which we may understand the movement of absence within the landscape.
- 5.110 The idea of a 'trace' is central to the theme of disappearance. And so, instead of providing an overview of the current literature on disappearance which is mainly based around narratives of decay and ruins (section 5.2), I will instead provide a brief overview on the idea of the trace.
- 5.111 A trace works as a testimony to that which has disappeared; it is the form of some thing which remains within the present to testify and act as witness to the very disappearance. "In every

case of disappearance, traces of something must remain, some being-there that was and is not, that is no longer" (Ophir, 2005:52).

- 5.112 As Levinas (1965:70) describes, the trace can be seen as a sign of remoteness, for instance footprints: "A mark traced on sand is not a part of a path, but the very emptiness of passage. And what has withdrawn is not evoked, does not return to presence, not even to an indicated presence". The trace then, prior even to its signifying presence as a marker of disappearance, traces the "very emptiness of an irrecoverable absence" (pp.70).
- 5.113 The trace gives double testimony to what is present; it tells of a presence of what is there as a remainder of the initial presence, for instance, it shows the presence of a decaying apple core. A trace *also* shows the presence of all the rest of what is absent; that is, the rest of the apple, the shiny skin and the ripened juicy flesh which is no longer present.
- 5.114 Finally, the trace also gives double testimony to absence itself; firstly it denotes that there was a presence which is no longer present, and secondly, it notes of a disappearance which took place between the initial presence and the presence of what remains of it.
- 5.115 Traces are the intersection of the visible and the invisible, the present and the past.
- 5.116 However, there can be a disappearance of the second degree; caused by the fading of traces, traces constitute a slowly loosening web of traces, where each leads directly to the notion of loss (see section 5.3).
- 5.120 Disappearance then, is a way of gauging and giving name to the demise of specific objects (see section 5.002). Such a notion of 'naming' is critical to developing landscape writing which is more inclusive and receptive to movements of absence. Specifically, as Ophir (2005:44) notes, "disappearance is an occurrence of en-tonguing", it is a speaking of and a bringing to presence of something which would otherwise remain absent. As such, "the en-tonguer betrays being, revealing what or who was hidden, causing what is there to appear" (pp.44).
- 5.121 Hence, speaking of disappearance allows the absent to become present within the landscape, although it does not necessarily ensure apprehending or capturing these absences *per se*. It is merely a way of speaking of the ebbing presences, capturing and allowing the infiltration of these traces into landscape narratives. As such, being inclusive to these moments of disappearance is a way of being *more* receptive to the absences within landscape. It is a way of fissuring and rupturing our present, opening out new spaces within landscape, reshaping the boundaries of the expressible and perceptible. "Disappearance is always a disturbance of some familiar order of things; one alongside the other and one within the other, a distance that opens up a gap" – "a gap between 'was there' (before) and 'is not there' (now)" (Ophir, 2005:51 & 45).

## 5.2 *Decay*

- 5.201 Decay is the playing out of disappearance within the landscape; “from the vantage point of the temporal present, we are able to correlate progress with a proximity into decline” (Trigg, 2006:96).
- 5.202 The presence of the decaying matter, the peeling paint, the rusting hull of the ship or the rotting half-eaten apple refers to what is absent; and what is absent has disappeared. The very decaying and disappearing presence of these specific objects is only present through this occurrence of fading, that is, through the very peeling, rusting or rotting. Of course the action of disappearance is there, but what is present through it is permeated by the gaps of absence.
- 5.203 Decay then, is the very decline from presence to absence which testifies to an ageing process within the landscape; delineating and tracing pathways to ruin. It spells out different patterns and temporalities of decay, witnessing and bearing testimony to both past and unknown presences.
- 5.204 Together, ruins and decay present a present which is distorted and saturated by absence; the ruins in and of themselves are inarticulate, indeterminate and hybrid. Yet they are the interchange and precarious relation between absence and presence within the landscape; they disguise whole realms of past presences.
- 5.210 Often, wasteland and ruins are seen as devoid of positive social, material and aesthetic qualities, surmised perhaps through the very lack of productive activity which occurs within their proximity. Yet as Edensor (2005a:9) suggests, they are in fact sites upon which “varied forms of dense sociality occur, they possess rich histories and differ according to size, materiality and state of disrepair”. Each pattern of decay revokes different accounts of the past from various and disparate angles, delineating and testifying to the very composition of elements which make up the present landscape.
- 5.220 And so literature on and around the theme of disappearance and decay, particularly within contemporary landscape narratives, tends to fold into accounts of ruins (see for instance Buck-Morss, 1989; Edensor, 2001, 2005a,b; DeSilvey, 2006; Trigg, 2006). Further, throughout all these accounts there is a distinct emphasis on specific accounts of landscape which are captured within the traces and shells of these former buildings and uncaptioned ruins.
- 5.221 Thinking through ruins offers new modes of speaking on the past through other-than-human agencies, offering interpretative approaches to considering the present landscape through discarded traces played out through the entropic processes of decomposition (DeSilvey, 2006:318).
- 5.222 A ruin continues to exist in the sphere of presence even though life has departed from it; it is a fragment from an earlier age, the decomposition of consciousness and existence; and, by

engaging with these traces of disappearance, new aspects – unknown, denied, or forgotten – are discovered (Ophir, 2005:96).

- 5.230 Ruins matter: They are objects which are other to human, they create disturbances within our order and conform to neither presence nor absence. They open up possibilities for new experiences, they foreground alternative aesthetics and transgress boundaries between outside and inside, and between human and non-human spaces (Edensor, 2005a:18).

### 5.3 Loss

- 5.301 “Loss is a singular type of disappearance: the irreversible disappearance of some irreplaceable thing. Whenever the disappeared is not replaceable, and as long as it has no replacement, it is a loss” (Ophir, 2005:89). A loss is a “desolation not made of evocations but of forgettings, forgettings in process, putting aside in the past” (Levinas, 1965:69).
- 5.302 To lose then, means to remember that which is lost; “the continuous presence of the loss depends on a constant effort of remembering”. Memory in itself is what allows the loss not to be lost; mourning and melancholia for instance may stop the movement of disappearance to loss. As Freud (1917:578) notes “mourning is a reaction to the real loss of a loved object”, it is a love for an object which *cannot* be given up “though the object itself is given up – [the loss] takes refuge in narcissistic identification”, hence, if a disappeared object is mourned for, it remains present through modes of suffering and debasing of the lost object (pp.588). Mourning (according to a Freudian reading) is however a finite process; once completed, the body may become free and uninhabited by the loss; the work of melancholia on the other hand, is never done. Melancholia occurs when the normal process of mourning is blocked; “affect remains attached to the lost object and time’s healing properties do not function to the expected degree” (Davis, 2007:132). Hence, in terms of melancholia, the disappearance never augments into true loss, as disturbances in the form of melancholic suffering continue to disrupt and set in motion the present.
- 5.303 True loss occurs when the memory of the disappeared object disappears as well; “the disappearance of memory, and the disappearance of traces of whatever has disappeared” (Ophir, 2005:60). This is when there are no traces or no decay to testify to what has disappeared; when the things that witnessed the original loss disappear as well. As Ophir considers in relation to death; “one day the people who were witnessed to my death will disappear as well. Then one day there will be no more witnesses. The future will bring total nothingness, an eternal void, a time of disappearance of the last disappearance and the disappearance of the traces left by the disappearance of this last disappearance, which will never occur as a real disappearance, because it will have no witnesses” (2005:49).

- 5.304 As can be seen, witnessing and testimony are central themes to the problem of loss. Loss and absence in particular highlight the very peculiar and particular structure of testimony and witness; testimony is seen as an instant of presence (Wylie, 2007b:183). It is an act which consists of making present a previous presence, to disclose or reveal that which is lost. However it always ‘falls-short’ in its attempt to represent loss; as indeed does *any* reference to loss due to the very singularity of loss itself (see 5.301). “The singular cannot be expressed in terms of what appeared when it disappeared; its disappearance is a loss” (Ophir, 2005:89). This, as previously suggested (see section 2.102-2.103), is the very mode through which Harrison (2007a:593) considers absence, characterised in terms of “the unavoidable obligations of relating the nonrelational”. It is an aporia which lies at the heart of all testimony; witnessing merely becomes an act of deferral, a way of comprehending without comprehension, speaking *for or in the place of loss*, discerning the ways in which the effects of loss may be encountered without ever speaking of loss itself. Despite this irreducible nonthematisability (Harrison, 2007a:591) there have however been varied attempts to speak in and of various capacities to lose; Ophir (2005) for instance considers loss both in theoretical terms and the experience of loss, particularly considering the notion of ‘exchange’.
- 5.310 Exchange considers “loss as expressed (perceived, interpreted) in terms of the depreciation it involves” where interpretation “is assessed in the values of an exchange system” (Ophir, 2005:131). It is an exchange system which forms one way in which to annul loss, that is, “to return it to a framework of exchange relations” (Ophir, 2005:90), to either replace the loss with a substitute or to displace the interest of the loss with a new interest.
- 5.311 To lose is to displace something from one level of existence to another; it is an endless movement of exchange and dislocation, a motion of things from “directly present to the eye and touch, to the level of things one can no longer touch but only represent” (Ophir, 2005:91). However, the notion of ‘exchange’ is not limited to palpable and concrete objects; it may also be termed in relation to that which has no presence to begin with. Here the loss is not necessarily linked to the past, it could be a loss of what is not yet, of a potential to do something or to become something, through an accident or loss of a chance. These are losses of things which represent *further* capacities; “an action, a feeling, a lottery ticket and so on” (Ophir, 2005:91). Think of the lottery ticket, it presents an opportunity to win, yet these winnings are represented only *via* the chance offered by owning the ticket, and as such, losing means displacing this particular representation from one representative level to another.
- 5.312 Another way of displacing loss to new levels of representation is through collections and souvenirs; museums and archives enable visitors to experience the disappeared as lost, creating a continued mourning of the disappeared harnessed within the cause of making sense of the process of disappearance (Engel, 2007:63). The souvenir is an object of exchange which both

"mourns and celebrates the gap between object and context of origin" (S. Stewart, 1993:164); and as such, the souvenir becomes the means through which the subject is able to possess a representation and recovered moment of the past (Frow, 1997, cited in Engel, 2007:76). It is a melancholic movement of exchange which allows people to incorporate particular lost instances into their lives, forging a connection with the disappeared. They become markers of the "constant presence of loss, the unstopping pain, becomes a new pole of identity" allowing "new aspects – unknown, denied or forgotten – to be discovered" (Ophir, 2005:96-7).

- 5.320 Loss then, whether termed as a form of exchange, deferral or process of mourning is important. It implies an interest in that which is absent. Loss is multiple, it passes from generation to generation; it is not always negative as it may be a gain; a positive force to open up and allow for new possibilities, potentialities and encounters.

#### 5.4 Refrain: *capacity, temporality and affective resonances*

- 5.401 In my earlier problematisation of absence I suggested that nonpresences operate through a nexus of three dimensions; *capacity, temporality and affective resonances*. Disappearance and decay are, in themselves, illustrations of the *capacity* of absence within the landscape. Their ebbing and dissipating qualities hint at previous presences whilst gesturing towards more enigmatic qualities which remain absent. Decaying matter in particular has liminal qualities; it neither conforms to the pristine and regimented order of modern landscape, nor is it totally absent. Precisely *because of this*, it may be considered an agent of folded *temporality*; triggering memories and collapsing the distance between past and present forging new potentialities and possibilities for generating and provoking different futures.
- 5.402 Indeed, it is the very *affective resonances* of these disappearing and fragmented presences which trigger and revoke memories, creating instability, possibility and potentiality. These are the shifting and ebbing presences which spell out new configurations of materiality *from which* a "distinctive sense of self and landscape" (Wylie, 2005:236) come about.
- 5.403 Yet all three of these movements of absence are haunted by the very problem of absence, that is, the falling-short of language to describe that which is no longer present, indeed, it is a problem which is integral to any absence. No description can determine these decaying absences in a final conclusive manner, yet, no determination of loss is possible without such a description. It is an unresolved semiotic circuit; "when the traces of what is lost are the signifier, and what was lost, or the loss itself, is the signified, the representation of what was lost (or of the event of loss as present) is fundamentally unstable" (Ophir, 2005:133). As described earlier this leads us only to be inclusive of the *movements* of absence within the landscape through their nexus of *temporality, capacity and affective resonances*.

5.404 As such, this first section of formalisation into a multiplicative typology presents a somewhat redemptive account of disappearance, loss and decay within the landscape. I have suggested that these accounts of absence may be encountered through traces which mark out and delineate the triple dimensions of absence. Through this, I have set up a basis for a hermeneutic encounter with absence, suggesting the need for landscape narratives to be receptive to each of these separate dimensions. By doing so, narratives in and of landscape will afford various new possibilities and potentialities upon encountering absence.

## 6.0 The resurgence of absence from the past

6.000 If the preceding section offered a redemptive account of disappearance, loss and decay, broadly characterised through a consideration of movements from *presence* to *absence*, then this section works through typologies characterised by counter-directional movement. Broadly speaking, memory, hauntologies and storytelling consider movements of *absence* to *presence* in various temporalities, dimensions and intensities. As with the preceding types of absences, they percolate through and into the landscape via their triple-dimensions of *capacity*, *affective resonances* and *temporality*.

6.001 A final point worth mentioning here before leading into this section, concerns my earlier claim which suggested that little had been done within nonrepresentational theory to address and rebalance the 'absence of absence'. This section will in fact read to the contrary, as it reviews and critiques a significant amount of literature on and around the theme. However, I hasten to add at this point, that the majority of this literature revolves around 'hauntologies' and has been published relatively recently over the past few months (here, I am referring mainly to the recent special edition of *Cultural Geographies*, 2008 which has released a plethora of work on the more spectral elements of both life and landscape).

### 6.1 Introduction: Hauntologies, memory and storytelling

6.101 Recent attempts within geography which have begun to consider the 'absence of absence' within contemporary narratives, and have mainly approached the task through a utilisation of spectral vocabularies. These, it has been suggested, are "particularly powerful and emancipatory way of dealing with a number of problematics central to contemporary geographical thought" (Maddern & Adey, 2008:291). As such, spectral accounts have become the means by which to consider the contemporary political moment and 'beyond real events', for instance Hurricane Katrina or September 11<sup>th</sup> (see Chevalier, 2001; Hetherington, 2001b; Shields, 2001). Such a spectral approach however, need not be bound only to the political; there has also been a proliferation of literature which puts spectral geographies into practice within the landscape offering haunted accounts of everyday life (see for instance Bell, 1997; Gordon,



1997; special edition of *Space & Culture*, 2001; Pile, 2005; special edition of *Cultural Geographies*, 2008).

- 6.102 Similarly, there has been a recent upsurge of contemporary narratives which spell out the dislocation of time and space through wider themes of exile, displacement, memory and historiography (see for instance Crang & Travlou, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Schlesinger, 2004; Wylie, 2007b). These accounts have scrutinised and considered the ways in which landscape is permeated with multiple absences and how such absent elements have and may become incorporated within narratives of landscape through various dislocations of time and movements of memory. These papers engaging with the fragmentary and absent elements of landscape have wider implications for contemporary landscape narratives; in particular, they offer specific insights into the way in which absence may be incorporated into narratives through methods which both complement and supplement spectral geographies.
- 6.103 The previous differentiation between decay, disappearance and loss showed that these specific forms of nonpresences work far more to illustrate the *capacity* of absence within landscape. Whilst memory, storytelling and hauntology do still purvey such movements of the *capacity* of absence, they are far more aligned to the *temporality* of absence. For instance, through hauntologies, stories and memories we are reminded that “within any ‘present’ a virtual multiplicity of possible futures, and pasts, exists” (Crang, 2001:203).
- 6.104 Similarly, whilst decay and disappearance are markers and traces of loss; memories, hauntologies and stories work *despite* these losses, in fact, they often work *in place* of these losses. They distort and fragment both temporality and landscape in order to make present a previous presence, trying to bring to light and testify to that which is lost.
- 6.105 Simply put, decay and disappearance work as dissipating traces of former materialities, whereas hauntologies, storytelling and memory work hermeneutically to draw *upon* and *from* these traces. As such, decay and disappearance may be categorised more as movements from *presence* to *absence*, whereas hauntologies, storytelling and memory work delineate movements in the opposite direction, from *absence* to *presence*; they work to *revoke* absences rather than *signifying* past presences.
- 6.106 Of course, there are still a series of common themes; storytelling for instance works as a moment of ‘en-tonguing’ (see section 5.120 and 5.304) which, in itself, is a form of testimony bringing to present something which would otherwise have remained absent. Similarly, a language of hauntology evolves from empirical moments provoked through decaying or disappearing matter within the landscape (see section 5.2). And, perhaps most importantly, they all hold in common the possibility of provoking new and chance encounters due to their liminal positioning and fundamentally unstable nature.

## 6.2 Hauntologies

- 6.201 Haunting and hauntologies, to use the words of Hetherington & Degan (2001:1), are "the recognition that the city, or any space, does not just exist in the present". Within the landscape there is the presence of absence, and absence of presence which spurs on momentary revelations; "the often just 'felt'; immutable qualities hardly obvious to the eye, described most of the time as an atmosphere, a mood, or the uncanny that surround us" (*ibid.*, pp.1).
- 6.202 History is replete with absences; every landscape contains seemingly sleepy, old-fashioned things; whether "defaced houses or closed-down factories... these are the debris of shipwrecked histories which today raise up the ruins of an unknown, strange city" (de Certeau & Giard, 1998:133). Spectrality may be described as a form of melancholia within the landscape; it is a disruption to the 'exchange' of loss (see section 5.304 – 5.312). It is not possible to characterise the landscape so simply as to suggest that "new information drops in, old details disappear" (Klein, 1997:2), rather there are constant insurgencies and disruptions through spectrality. The ghost is a revenant, it resurfaces unexpectedly, dislocating space and time, imperceptibly circulating through its uncanny aura, triggering, sparking and distorting the landscape.
- 6.203 Hauntings are subjective experiences, a personal encounter with absences' *affective resonances*; they are "a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will... into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (Gordon, 1997:8). Hauntings are transformative through the very way in which they entail a sense of uncertainty and suspense; otherwise passive moments surge into our presence through memories, ruins, stories, old photographs, smells wafting through the air, particular songs and sounds. They circulate and disrupt the landscape in their divergent and unsuspecting ways, animating silenced agencies and intimating new relations of self and world.
- 6.204 Hauntings imply both a spatial and temporal politics which is complex, uneven and multifaceted (Maddern & Adey, 2008:292). They circulate along and throughout the invisible social relations played out in everyday life; they tell of the overlapping topologies and relations within the social and cultural imaginary, displacing and emphasising the 'out-of-jointness' of time. Indeed, as Matless suggests drawing upon Buse & Scott (1999); "haunting, by its very structure, implies a deformation of linear temporality" (2008:338). Spectres are not trapped within the flow of linear time and do not conform to the chronologically ordered temporality of past, present and future. Instead, the ghost exists in several times at once: "It is of the past, wants something of the future, but is only connected to the present as an apparition, simultaneously visible and invisible" (Pile, 2005:139).

- 6.205 Whilst spectres and hauntings are bound to no particular temporality, they are however contingent upon specific locales, and whilst this, particularly when considering landscape, could perhaps be seen as a restraint there are a series of further affordances generated by such place-specific absences. Here, I refer directly to the notion of the 'uncanny'; which, in a similar manner to hauntings, works to dislocate linear temporality.
- 6.206 The uncanny is an *affective resonance* which frightens and displaces landscape and self. It is a distancing from reality forced by reality; it is unsettling, *unheimlich* or unhomely (as Freud translates directly from the German, 1919). Yet whilst uncanny auras may be conceived as both frightening and strange, they are simultaneously comforting and familiar; as Edensor (2005a:152) notes, "to encounter such things is to encounter a radical otherness which is also part of ourselves". Uncanniness is subjective as well as tied to specific locales; it is a sense of personal homeliness which is uprooted: "It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context" (Royle, 2003:1). It is a personal recursion, yet it cannot be 'owned' in and of itself; rather it is an affective resonance hinting at and suggestive of that which "ought to have remained secret and hidden, but has come to light" (Schelling, 1860 cited in Vidler, 1999:26). Indeed, it contains the sense of a secret encounter; inseparable from an apprehension, disturbing any straight forward sense of what is inside and what is outside.
- 6.207 Rather like decaying matter and ruins, the uncanny has liminal qualities (see section 5.401). It is bound and framed within the strangeness of borders; neither fully present nor absent, but a revenant replica of the past returning at sudden and unexpected moments. It is a haunting, yet familiar past, "eliding the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming" (Vidler, 1999:11).
- 6.210 As can be seen, no single notion or description of haunting in itself exists; it is a vague, disconnected and nebulous concept. Speaking of spectrality however does not request a *belief* in ghosts but rather provides a useful motif by which to unsettle the ordered linear historical accounts which dominate the majority of contemporary social science. Haunting and anachronistic upsurges allow past, present, presence and future to remain open to being disrupted by playful phantoms and spectres which arise with 'uncanny agency' from 'unforeseen events' (Maddern & Adey, 2008:293). By drawing upon this spectral motif, both landscape and narrative become open to being haunted by the very things they exclude. In the case of this research, it offers the chance to be more open to the excluded nonpresences in the landscape, supplementing and spurring chance encounters and unforeseen circumstances to arise.

- 6.220 Recent years have seen a proliferation of narratives which incorporate 'haunting *motifs*'; below I shall discuss two contrasting ways in which spectrality has been successfully incorporated into landscape narratives. Edensor (2008), following a similar methodology to his previous accounts of ruins (2002, 2005a, b) follows a broadly hermeneutic approach, demonstrating how traces left behind by previous forms of life, inhabitants, politics, ways of thinking and being, and modes of experience continue to exert their haunting capacity, disrupting current life and practise of the landscape. In contrast, Matless (2008) discusses the use and impact of narrative style in evoking affective resonances of haunting. He does so via an engagement with the spectral landscape of Mary Butts' literature which conveys a sense of both "enchantment and secret meaning" (pp.335).
- 6.221 Edensor considers ruins, alternative materialities and spaces alongside the more spectral elements of landscape (2002, 2005a, b, 2008). Through an engagement with neglected sites, Edensor both challenges the Western obsession for pristine and manicured landscapes whilst simultaneously offering spectral glimpses of the past through an aesthetic of disorder and decay (see also Trigg, 2006). His most recent publication *Mundane Hauntings* (2008) is his most explicit attempt to consider spectrality in the realm of everyday mundane landscapes. Throughout the article, Edensor draws out motifs of haunting through the idea of *absent-presences* (pp.324). Through a language and vocabulary of haunting, Edensor is able to illustrate how these absent-presences are folded into the fabric of the everyday city. By drawing upon "self-evident and conspicuous absences" (pp.325) he is able to draw out elements of the "phantasmagoric working class that haunt the space" (pp.329), residing within the landscape in mediated forms and in sensual recollections; "they are indistinct, half-recognisable, ephemeral entities" (pp.329).
- 6.222 Edensor concludes by suggesting such 'ephemeral' spectres emerge from a fragmentary basis, noting that these partial evocations are grounded within familiar experience, and are contingent upon a "habituated and embodied" understanding of the landscape (pp.326). This idea is suggestive of an approach to landscape which takes seriously the uncanny instances and affective resonances of absence which circulate, disrupt and collapse the linear temporality which is usually definitive of landscape accounts.
- 6.230 Matless' *A Geography of Ghosts* (2008) whilst still inclusive of the triple dimensions of absence, uses a very different approach to that of Edensor. Instead of a hermeneutic approach to considering the landscape, Matless considers spectrality through an exploratory account of the work of Mary Butts', a modernist English novelist whose work engages with themes of the spectral.
- 6.231 Matless' paper is in itself already haunted; to begin with, his empirical material is based upon traces of Butts' literary career. Her stories, novels, journals and autobiography offer a

fragmentary basis from which he may begin to consider spectral landscapes which are already inclusive of slippages and elements lost within the haze of time.

- 6.232 Butts' writing offers a "local topography in literary form" (pp.339) illustrating the irrevocably entwined nature of landscape and narrative. As such, Butts' accounts convey the "supernatural in fiction meeting a supernatural actuality" (pp.343) where uncanny instances and ghostly disclosures saturate the narrative. These instances evoke the *capacity* of absence within landscape; most explicitly illustrated through the brief overview of *With and without buttons*, a formal ghost story written by Butts in 1932 (Matless, 2008:344-346). The folded *temporality* of absence is evoked through the juxtaposition of the contemporary review of Butts' literature set against the longer 'demonic past' of spectrality and haunting (pp.336-337).
- 6.233 Matless also notes how the folding of temporality occurs within Butts' stories, for instance, through the ghost of *dead Felicity* in *The Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932) who offers a "real link to an authentic England rooted in an idea of ancient and timeless continuity within the rural past" (Matless, pp.341, citing Garrity, 2003). Finally, the *affective resonances* of absence are played out through "enigmatic and mysterious sites and occurrences" (pp.343) and through 'transition' when "a place becomes another place" (pp.343). Such a transition, according to Vidler (1999:1) is a symptom of the uncanny; "a play of doubling, where the other is, strangely enough, experienced as a replica of the self, all the more fearsome because apparently the same".
- 6.234 However, as Matless notes, for all the promise which Butts' literature offers for spectral narratives in terms of the haunted nature of the accounts in themselves, saturated by the lineage of the demonic past, the surges of Celtic heritage and the uncanny auras, they always fall short in their "misguided desire to search it out [the spectral] and pin it down" (pp.350). However, this failure in itself tells of the incomplete and irreducible qualities of spectres, illustrating the very problem of absence. Perhaps then, with this in mind, Butts' literature and Matless' review are haunted in themselves, they carry with them irresolvable losses and unspeakable instances, and by doing so offer new possibilities and potentialities to be afforded within further landscape narratives.

### 6.3 Memory

- 6.301 "Memories", writes W.B. Sebald, "lie slumbering within us for months and years, quietly proliferating, until they are awoken by some trifle" (2002: 255).
- 6.302 Memories, in common with all types of absence, cannot be classified in and of themselves (see section 3.0), they are the recursions of past experiences; recent and distant, focused and hazy, engaged with out of habit, prompted by other materialities or involuntary experiences. They are never direct re-experiences in themselves, but evocative of specific circumstances, intensities and situations made present and stimulated through a variety of substances and

perspectives. They are disparate and may not be entirely personal, they may be passed down and inherited from other people and circumstances; past to presence, lapsed and present.

- 6.303 Memories, rather like hauntings, both bring together whilst simultaneously dislocating time and space. They foreground alternative ways of knowing and speaking about how and where things should be situated, transgressing boundaries between inside and outside, human and non-human, ineffable and retrievable.
- 6.304 Involuntary memories are perhaps most evocative of hauntings; they are uncanny instances, which in themselves are a nostalgic 'sense of the past' triggered upon encountering specific locales and scenes. The uncanny is a radical otherness which is also part of ourselves; subjective yet not 'owned', disrupting every sense of interior and exterior as well as linear temporality (see 6.206-7).
- 6.305 The uncanny recurs most regularly, if not most imperceptibly, through the ostinato performance of habits. Habits are after all, the eternal return of the same, the endless and uncanny drive to repeat, and as such, an evocation of a nostalgic sense of the past. Habitual gestures are an "expression of a mode of being-in-the-world" (Harrison, 2000:508), they remind us of the constant folding and unfolding of temporality, of the unceasing and advancing movement of absence to present. Yet habits in themselves are, as Vidler (1999:38) notes, "an incessant movement without movement" endlessly repeating without any particular means or ends. They are involuntary, without image or property, they embody the past through actions "enabling the ongoing conduct of everyday life" (Anderson, 2004b:8). As such, these embodiments become so much a part of the everyday life that they are not necessarily thought of as movements of past to present, absent to presence.
- 6.306 Within habits, in fact, because of this constant repetition of the same, there is a possibility of slippage; inept within all memory and repetitive playing of habits is an epistemological gap; "the uncertainty and misconnection between memory and place" (Travlou & Crang, 2001:166). Habit is contingent upon the last playing out of a repetitive figure; each unfolding movement is reliant upon that which came before, and because of this, each action of memory is infused with new possibilities; of amnesia, of false recollection or disruptions to the figurative motif (cf. Rose, 2007). Undernably, the notion of forgetting is implicit to memory; when the familiar dissipates to unfamiliar, sensations lost and intensities no longer revoked; the grasp of amnesia leaves the past unfathomable, fragments so fractured they may not be connected in a comprehensible or recognisable manner. As Klein (1997) notes, "no memory is released, or stored, without some degree of erasure" (pp.306).
- 6.307 All memories work within this cycle of loss and disappearance; memory is a means by which to preserve that which has disappeared (see section 5.0). It works to oppose the disappearance of past experiences within particular places, which it is why it unceasingly dislocates both space

and time. Indeed, memories are interesting precisely *because* the experience has disappeared and ceased to be present within the landscape in its exacting forms. Memories are traces of an excessive present, and as such, like all traces, they may be overwritten, distorted or lost. *All* memories are only ever indistinct and allusive; “they reside in the marginal geography of the exterior, beyond the limit of the thinkable” (Cohen, 1996, cited in Edensor, 2008:330). They are simultaneously far away and close at hand; contingent upon specific impulses to provoke and bring them to mind.

- 6.310 Again, in common with hauntings, memories are provoked by impulses; sights, smells, sounds and textures become the effective medium “to orchestrate personal remembering” (Lorimer, 2005:87). Gillian Rose (2003) considers how family photographs are used to stretch time and space in integrative and complex ways, noting how photographs act to supplement and substitute memory producing a “space which is differential. It is integrative, but haunted by fractures and absences... here-now/there-then and presence/absence” (pp.9). Photographs draw upon a past which is ‘finished’ and ‘established’; it is not a progressive past but an episodic one (G. Rose, pp.14). This is what Anderson (2004b) labels as *intentional remembering*, in which a past is “conditioned to occur as a fixed, relatively ‘durable’ memory” (pp.3); within this, a palpable prompt is explicitly used to aid the ‘remembering of something’. The object used to revoke memories, whether a photograph (G. Rose, 2003) or listening to a particular music track (Anderson, 2004b), does not represent the past but rather “enacts time-space, and thus the past, into becoming” (*ibid.*, pp.16). However, the memories which are revoked are done so in terms of affective intensities and emotional surges, they offer no way to retrieve it experientially in the same way in which ‘habit memory’ allows the past to become immediately available.
- 6.311 Despite these fundamental differences of both ‘habitual memory’ and ‘intentional remembering’, both serve the potential for creating new orders. Episodes become built upon episodes as memories fragment and spur new hybrid memories. The landscape becomes hazy and distorted; broken then rebound as memories *take* place; “take hold of it [place], wrench and twist it as it were, such that apparitions shimmer in the air before a stricken observer” (Wylie, 2007b:176).

#### 6.4 Storytelling

- 6.401 Storytelling, like memories, “mark a border between the remembered and the forgotten” (Haug *et al.*, 1987, cited in Gordon, 1997:26).
- 6.402 In many ways, stories are simply another manifestation of spectrality within the landscape; in the same way in which spectral motifs form unsettling mixtures of the linear sequence of past, present and future, so too do stories. Stories are a form of fictional testimony which offer a way

of comprehending without necessarily requesting comprehension. They work to displace the present from itself through a nexus of fiction and fact (or 'faction' as Hodges, 2000:4 suggests), not necessarily delivering the *significance* of the resurgence of past memories, nor telling us of the motives and history of teller and listener; "they show us *what* is remembered, not *why* it is remembered" (Rosen, 1985:32).

- 6.403 Narratives are often a reorganisation of what happened in direct experience; the 'facts' are reorganised so that what happened becomes what *might* happen; we invent the actors, manipulate the action, and reshape the circumstances, provocations and outcomes. By doing so, stories may extend the possibilities of human experience.
- 6.404 Both W.B. Sebald (1998, 2001, 2002) and Kathleen Stewart (1996) use a form of landscape narrative akin to the notion of storytelling to create densely textured and non-specific accounts of landscape. Within their narratives, they incorporate both present absences and absent presences in spectral and haunting ways. Both authors use a form of writing which, according to Rose (2006:537), "is not fiction, in that it is not self-consciously inventive, but nonetheless imaginative" (see also Wylie, 2007b:183). Through these narratives, both Sebald and Stewart reconstruct landscape through a series of reminiscences about place, people, times and spaces. Neither reconstructs a 'true' account or indeed a perfect biography of the landscape, rather they weave a landscape through memory; resulting in labyrinth-like narratives, piecing together whilst simultaneously dislocating time and space. These are psychological, physical, subjective and haunted spaces where each fragment traces out new associations and infinities in and of landscape.
- 6.405 All fictional worlds have about them the aura of the possible; they offer a chance to reflect on the actual without being entirely bound by it. They may be surging and intense, wandering and fragmentary, displaced and unsettled through elusive spectral memories of places and selves. These however, are stories of the landscape which narrativise a gap through which ghostly disjunctures may pass, disrupting and unsettling our present. They are stories which are productive, helping to weave new landscapes and subjectivities through the very absent presences which they are based upon and weave together.
- 6.406 Stories are unpredictable and contingent; "'word' and 'world' never quite attain a pure and seamless fusion" (Clarke, 2003:29), rather there are openings and slippages, distortions and improvisations which meld together event with fictitious fabrication, landscape with hazy and fragmented memory. The stories of both Sebald and Stewart are graphic and "promote a strange intimacy of subject and object, drawing them together in a melancholic consciousness that knows itself only in passing into its other" (Stewart, 1996:111).
- 6.407 Within them, folk-tales may no longer be separated from anecdotes, fables from 'objective' fact; they merge, emerge and entwine about each other. The sheer ubiquity, pervasiveness and



multiplicity of forms of narrative both in Sebald and Stewart's work, but also more generally within the landscape, make storytelling an imposing and haunting force. They dislocate space, time and subject, intimating new and divergent relations, encompassing and extending the possibilities of experience of intersubjectivities; "the relationship between story-teller and story-listener is always interchangeable, always a collaboration" (Rosen, 1985:25).

### 6.5 Refrain: capacity, temporality and affective resonances

- 6.501 Hauntologies, memory and storytelling operate, as all absences do, through the tri-dimensional nexus of *capacity*, *temporality* and *affective resonance*. Each typology works through these dimensions to offer and respond to the problem of absence, although, as with decay, disappearance and loss (see section 5.0) they are left to engage only with the *movements* of absence rather than absence *in* and *of* itself.
- 6.502 Spectrality has the capacity to awaken a previously absent world; the *capacity* of hauntings realises the *affective intensities* in and of landscape and the complexities of spectral relations through uncanny recursions of otherwise absent presences. As Gordon (1997) notes, "to study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it" (pp.7), and these haunting moments disrupt notions of linear time, acting as revenants within the landscape, dislocating and altering time from space leaving neither in its former state. Indeed, spectrality occurs *because* of these very dislocations of space and time; hauntings and uncanny instances come to presence from these folds and fissures, deep within the vicissitudes of landscape.
- 6.503 Memories and stories are closely entwined with one another; as two specific typologies of absence, stories arise from both habitual and involuntary memories, as well as being a form of *intentional remembering* in and of themselves (see section 6.3). As such, storytelling and the narration of memory comes about as a direct response to the problem of absence; "language clearly shows that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but its theatre" (Benjamin, 1932, cited in Klein, 1997:236). Despite this, no memory is released, stored or played out without some degree of erasure; to negotiate these losses and obliterations, storywriters make montage narratives based upon 'fact' or 'fiction narrative'. "We do not after all pluck our stories only from direct experience: We invent the experience, the actors, the action, the circumstances, the provocations and the outcomes" (Rosen, 1985:15).

## 7.0 From here

- 7.000 Throughout this chapter I have tried to demonstrate the multiple ways in which the 'absence of absence' may be responded to within landscape narratives. In particular, I have tried to illustrate the multiple divergencies of absence, which illustrate that there is not one singular definition of absence, but multiple and proliferating methods and ways for engaging with the

infinite absences which circulate and disrupt landscape and landscape narratives. Creating this typology has aimed to demonstrate just some of the ways in which absence manifests itself and comes to present within the landscape.

- 7.001 The following chapters continue this along the same line; employing new methods, techniques and ways of writing landscape which are receptive to these multiple and proliferating absences within landscape.

## IV Methodology: gathering fragmented materials

### Introduction

Absences are multiple and proliferating, fluid, subjective and contingent. They slip through and dislocate both time and space; they are ubiquitous whilst remaining determinately elusive and, misleadingly, may be named dependent upon their variable capacities. Yet the interest lies not simply in the fact that these presences and absences are multiple, but also in their gathering and presentation within narratives, which recrafts, alters and distorts the ways in which landscape and subjectivity come about. In particular, I am concerned with the possibility of speaking on *movements* of absence rather than absence in and of itself. As such, I do not have a single response to the question of absence posed in the preceding chapter. Rather, in continuing accordance with the beginnings of the typology I have already laid out, I will offer an insight into just *some* of the attributes and movements of absence within the landscape, collating, formalising and offering potential narratives on a few more absences.

This methodology in itself is not meant give answers or detail precisely the ways in which I went out to 'find' absences in Blackpool. Simply put, I didn't. Absences are always already there, they are inherent in the ways in which landscape and self come about, a working out of the tension between what is present and what is not. It was never a simple case of tallying-up and interpreting data sets, working out and calculating statistics of the proportion of absences to presences; that would be impossible. Of course, that is not to deny that I went out camera-and-notebook-in-hand searching for clues of past presences; peeling paint, fading buildings, rusting metal work and so forth. But some absences are not so obvious as to warrant such a pragmatic approach, they are far more elusive and often it is not until they are manipulated and written within narratives that they come to presence, or indeed, as in some cases, remain inconspicuous by their very absence. As such, there is no precise method by which to encounter absences; they are *always* there, multiple, continuously proliferating, ebbing, fluxing and fluctuating within the landscape. And so, to encounter them I had to rely on a somewhat 'make-do methodology' (Lorimer, 2006) gathering even so much as slight instances and traces of past presences and present absences which disrupt and cause incursions within our order. Further, the narrative becomes the means by which to encounter absences, and so moments of interpretative commentary also have to be viewed and considered as "just other textual fragment of the same order as any other item in the collection" (Dorst, 1989:5).

As can be seen then, this chapter hopes to detail the ways in which movements of absence may be recognised in landscape *and* narratives. The chapter should be viewed as a continued formalisation and typologising of absence; showing how absences may potentially be encountered and percolate into and throughout our landscape through the use of auto-ethnography, montage literature and other imaginative forms of landscape writing. Perhaps it is also worth reiterating

again at this point that these typologies, in common with those of the preceding chapter, rest upon the *movements* of absence rather than absence *in* and *of* itself. As such, the general tone of the chapter presents an affirmative account of these movements of absence, looking at the possibilities and potentialities that are afforded when these movements of absence are included into landscape narratives.

## Ethnography

"I've never seen that in all my days – so you live and learn", commented Daddy from the wheel of the car as we edged along Fleetwood Road.

"It's quite pleasant round here isn't it?" Mummy chimed in, questioning no-one in particular.

"'All Hallow's Rectory', here you go". This is the Church I had put a request in to see on the drive into Blackpool. It is one of the earliest churches in Bispham, just to the north of Blackpool; there has been a place of worship on the site since pre-1140. It could perhaps be determined as the first presence of 'Blackpool' as a town of serviceable dwelling in the area.

"Jesus loves you..." muttered Mummy reading off the maroon almond-shaped sign which seem to have appeared outside the majority of Churches over the last decade. "It's pretty, look at the little gate" [sneezes] "uoah, ex-cuse-me! It's locked, you can't get in".

"Can't you?"

"The gates look to be shut".



Daddy and I got out and traipsed across the road through the double gates, we were met by a cheery parishioner just leaving the church. Letting ourselves in, we followed the path around the front, the gravel crunching under our feet. Around the back of the plot, our sights were met by a population of hundreds of crooked gravestones; some flat on the ground, others rising at crazy angles; angels, plinths and columns.

It was my first encounter with the obviously absent, the graveyard was a plethora of traces to those who

had disappeared. Yet despite the liminal nature of this somewhat morbid landscape, almost instantly it was possible to see the connections and encounters forged by these present absences:

"Now that's a famous name around here", commented Daddy, signalling towards a headstone of a member of the 'Garlick' family. "They ran a newsagents, I'm not sure if it was the same man, but he eventually got so hacked off he walked into the sea until only his hat was showing".



My ethnography of the landscape of Blackpool comes closest to the notion of 'generating materials' as opposed to 'collecting data' (Whatmore, 2003:93). Inherent within this style of research is the problematisation over specific notions of "what 'research' is, what evidence is, and how the two relate to each other" (Crang, 2005:232). Rather than focusing upon single locales to process qualitative data, it engages with 'multi-sited' fieldwork to trace networks, connecting multiple sites and other possible connections. Indeed, the interest is not simply that the presences and absences are multiple; it is also on the *representation* of non-coherence and multiplicity (Law, 2004:92). And so, this ethnography as a form of engagement with the landscape, is open ended; that is not to say that my approach to landscape and research lacks discipline, but rather it is an unsettling performative approach, an experimental way of seeing the world. It is a methodology which doesn't follow an exacting or pre-described form, but rather picks upon and chases after traces which spark interest, snippets of only partial present absences which lead to immemorial and lost pasts. It is fragmented and happenchance, enacting density, texture and multifarious temporalities of the landscape through multiple encounters and experiences which surface through engagements within the landscape. It is a nonrepresentational encounter with the landscape; practices of walking, eating and thinking, wandering, milling and reminiscing form the basis of the engagement. From here, nonrepresentational theory is adopted as a background hum, "asking questions of style, form, technique and method, and ushering in experimental kinds of response" (Lorimer, 2008:556).

As can be seen, the auto-ethnographic method employed to gather empirical moments is based upon a series of otherwise fairly banal and habitual wanderings, seeking to activate both space and time. By directly engaging with a seafront transect, running from just north of Bispham, momentarily diverging into the town before ending by the Pleasure Beach at South Shore, this research seeks to provide an account of the landscape in terms of present, past, presence and future. However mundane and arbitrary the accounts of landscape along this transect may seem, they are in fact hugely evocative of the normative modes of practising the landscape of Blackpool for my family. We still regularly go to Blackpool just for a walk along the front, a 'cuppa tea' and drop onto North Pier for a quick game of air hockey. As such, each day of research was spent



following a similar form; visiting the usual haunts, stopping off for ice-cream treats, playing on the penny slot machines, watching rock being made whilst munching on warm off-cuts, eating fish & chips, walking along the promenade and just sitting soaking up the unique atmosphere of Blackpool.

In many ways this style of research is similar to Dorst's study on St. Chadds Ford (1989), an elite suburb in southeastern Pennsylvania which has forged its own particular historical identity through multiple avenues from community celebrations, museums and the creation of travel magazines, to postcards, interior decorations, snapshots and stories. Through these



objects and events, Dorst considers the ways in which the landscape comes about through multiple and fragmented sources from both past and present, jarring against and dislocating linear conceptions of both time, space and landscape. In a similar way, my ethnographic approach not only details events whilst in Blackpool, but is also supplemented by scraps of stories, events, thoughts and atmospheres which are triggered and generated encountering the landscape of Blackpool and also through memories and souvenirs of past trips brought to presence through reminders, hints and moments of reminiscing.

Throughout the research I will be reliant on these past souvenirs and reminders of trips to Blackpool, in particular presenting various photographs both taken recently and also from past family holidays stretching back to the 1940s. It could perhaps be conceived that this reliance on photographs foregrounds the visual as the primary mode of apprehending absence; however, this is not the case. It is simply that other forms of perception and sensual engagement cannot be as easily or successfully incorporated into the written format as the visual may. Equally, I want to argue that photographs in themselves are never merely visual, but in fact “conjure up synaesthetic and kinaesthetic effects, for the visual provokes other sensory responses” (Edensor, 2005a:16). To emphasise this, I have chosen to leave all images uncaptioned; the text surrounding the images provides a floating narrative of explanation, alongside the affected and affecting nature of each photograph in a hope to allow the images to become alternative sources to the text, which in themselves may provoke more nebulous memories, encounters and new possibilities.

Auto-ethnography as a methodology of collecting empirical moments of layered presences, absences and past presences within the landscape may broadly be described as a hermeneutic method. However, this collection of empirical moments forms only *part* of the way in which the landscape of Blackpool comes about; as with any form of research, the style of presenting these

empirical moments through narratives plays a significant role in the coming about of landscape and subjectivity. And so now, I will turn to comment upon the ways in which I have built up a narrative montage of Blackpool.

### Montage Literature



Our small family convoy wandered along the promenade; it's so familiar and unchanging, the solid concrete slabs always holding firm and giving a seemingly indestructible quality to the coastline. They always stand solid despite the battering wrath of the ocean and the tumultuous gales which regularly spill over and whip the path with bounds of excessive energy. Around the corner the boating pool protrudes from the promenade, it's like a swollen tumour bulging out into the sea, deforming the otherwise gently curving front. In the midst of the slightly dampened interior, workers are arranging tyres into a race-track formation, preparing for crowds of summer visitors. It used to hold a boating pool owned by the Maxwell family, when the father died, it got passed down to the son.

"Mainly motorboats – those were the fun ones, the canoes and rowing boats were in a separate pond – they weren't quite as much fun!

"I [my father] used to work 9 'til dusk six days a week for a couple of summers, we weren't allowed Saturdays or Sundays off. If the rain set in for the afternoon, we closed for the day.

"We had to watch the weather; if the storm cone was put up on the end of the North Pier we knew stormy weather was imminent. If the cone did go up, we had to collect all the equipment together as quickly as possible, tying the boats to ropes which went the length of the boating pool to stop them from filling with water and sinking.



"Following a storm there was always a major clean up; sand, mud, letting water out of the sluices. Then back to business as soon as possible!"



Montage, as defined by Allan Pred (1995) who is perhaps contemporary geography's most famous advocate of the method, summarises it as "a simultaneous showing of different (geographical hi)stories" (pp.23). As such, it is an expressive and experimental method of presenting both landscape and form through textual and pictorial means. As a technique, it combines disparate elements into one composition creating the illusion that the elements were initially together. In doing so, it presents a fragmented assemblage of narratives and images bringing the past into tension-filled constellation within the present moment "which speaks to the here and now in strikingly unexpected but potentially meaningful and politically charged ways" (Pred, 1995:24). Literary montage allows the present to resonate at several levels at once, it confronts the reader with the possibility of seeing, hearing and sensing what would otherwise remain imperceptible. Once implemented as a form of landscape narrative, it allows the otherwise absent past to be apprehended from a vantage-point in the present; these new and ruptured moments of dislocated space and time then take on a "particular significance because of their relationship to the present" (Willis, 1991, cited in Pred, 1995:23).

Montage as a framework for landscape narratives forms a forum for absences to play out. As already mentioned, it allows disparate entities to be brought into relation with one another, not necessarily excavating empirical moments from the landscape in the ethnographic and hermeneutic sense, but rather as a way of making visible the otherwise unforeseen moments in the landscape; "showing the particular – anonymous dispersed – practices and the particular – differentiated, heirarchised – spaces through which particular societies make particular things visible" (Gregory, 1991, cited in Pred, 1995:11).

In many ways, montage literature is not dissimilar to 'fictocritical writing', a largely unexplored method of narrative in Anglo-American geography. Fictocriticism merges practices of fiction, theory and criticism, which, in turn are expounded and merged through creative non-fictional stories. For landscape narratives, this opens possibilities for telling the landscape in different ways, it is a way of 're-enchanting' the world (Mueke, 2002:108) through pictures, anecdotes, collections, and weighty-descriptive narratives which are entwined about theoretical arguments. Fictocriticism allows "a number of quite distinct writing positions (or voices) to play out at once, working through and across one another, delving into registers and genres which they would not usually reach" (Hodge & McHoul, 1992, cited in Kerr, 2001:115). Hence, as a narrative tool, this form of 'research-fiction' is uniquely situated for understanding the multiple and proliferating movements of absence within the landscape.

As can be seen then, montage literature and fictocriticism are particularly useful methodologies for landscape narratives; neither lays down any specific form or framework to adhere to, but rather both offer suggestive points of departure. They hint towards and open up



new modes of narrative, engendering possibilities for recognising how different affordances of both presence and absence are inseparably entwined and may be made intelligible within landscape and landscape narratives. Indeed, as Pred (1995:25) inadvertently states, through montage “one may attempt to bring alive, to open the text to multiple ways of knowing and multiple sets of meaning, to allow differently situated voices to be heard, to speak to (or past) each other as well as to the contexts from which they emerge and to which they contribute”.

### Imaginative narrative



Picture this scene, an ordinary day on the north-western seafront on the very edge of this, our little isle. Despite the supposed demise of tourist trade there remains a veritable hubbub of people milling along the promenade. Picture the children dashing back and forth chased by the continuous cycle of waves gliding and

ebbing, the changeable boundary of terra firma and mater maris. Picture the dog walkers, the cyclists and the slow walk of pensioners. Not a single seat left vacant along the seafront. Imagine the gentle chatter of the rushing water, the fleeting highs of swells and gentle diminuendo of withdrawal. Imagine the raucous calls of gulls which pierce and incise across the sea’s background mummer. Picture the tower, so rigid and proud, the centre piece of the town, its shiny-red exterior dominating the skyline, pervading every view, haunting the landscape with its absolute omnipresence.



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Autoethnography, fictocriticism and montage literature merge under the broader genre of ‘auto-biographical, quasi-ethnographic travelogue’ (Schlesinger, 2004:49). It is a form of imaginative literature which narrates the landscape through a playing out of the tensions between ‘fictional’ and ‘nonfictional’ writing. It is a style of imaginative writing best seen in work of W.B. Sebald (1998, 2001, 2001) and Kathleen Stewart (1996) (see *Typologies*, 6.404-5). Their style is one which “self-consciously understands its own purpose; to picture, to portray, to envision” (Rose, 2006:537, on Stewart, 1996). These narratives bring to present memories, they follow the circulation

of desires, attachments and meanings, and transform otherwise absent presences into a mental tableau, set before the reader's eye through imaginative, poetic and expressive prose. This genre of imaginative writing offers a *mis-en-abyme* of landscape; it is subjective and often auto-biographical, only partially offering and imagining *some* the multiple and proliferating scenes within the landscape. The texts are open-ended and experimental, the material is inherently refractory, disrupting and disturbing the reader, questioning established methods and modes of response, as well as placing into question the boundary between 'fiction' and 'fact' (cf. Rosen, 1985; DeLyser, 2003).

It is an open-ended style which offers a site of departure in the infinite reproduction of landscape; destabilising common conceptions by raising, both implicitly and explicitly, a series of unanswerable questions both in and of landscape. The narratives work to displace the present landscape from itself, they supplement it and unhinge both past and present. Despite the dense and eloquently constructed narratives, there remain slippages and absences within them. For instance, throughout Sebald's work, there are various uncaptioned photographs referring to events and landscapes, which, whilst offering evidence do not offer any direct resolution to the gaps within memory itself. In answer to this, Stewart (1996:26-27) suggests that the text-image montage is to be seen as an "interpretative space in itself – a space produced in the slippage, or gap, between sign and referent, event and meaning, and gathered into performed forms and tactile reminders".

Consequently, as a particular methodology for contemplating the 'absence of absence' within landscape, these forms of imaginative writing are of critical importance; not only do they speak of absence but they are also receptive to these absences within and of themselves. The *mis-en-abyme* structure of the fragmented texts implicitly recognises the infinite nature of landscapes and subjectivities, presences and absences. As such, the narratives do not try to narrate or create a 'whole', but rather offer one of infinite haunting narratives, making present otherwise absent elements, textures and densities within the landscape. The narratives are porous, their fragmented nature holds infinite absences and slippages, their form of partially historical objectivity is haunted by an excess of evidence, they are visited, as Jackson (2001) suggests, by the "historiographic revenant" (pp.469). Speaking of the *always already* excessive nature of history in which no 'truthful' or 'objective' writing is ever adequate. As such, these landscape narratives do not seek to represent 'objective' or 'truthful' histories; instead they offer fictional narratives "imprinted all over by testimony, by evidence, by the urge to testify" (Wylie, 2007b:184, on Sebald).

Most importantly, these imaginative writings produce new vocabularies and stylistically experimental methods to describe, analyse and draw empirical moments into narratives; both drawing upon absent presences, and remaining, in and of themselves, receptive to present absences. They offer a means through which it becomes possible to consider the *movements* of absence within landscape, and give some direction into suggesting how absence may be written

into nonrepresentational accounts of landscape. They offer a form of innovative literary ethnography providing an opening from which social and cultural geographies concerned with self, landscape and history may begin.

### **From here**

Once more, this series of methodologies and research is not intended as a single response to the problem of absence. Indeed, if absences are as contingent, ephemeral and subjective as I suggested in the previous chapter on the *typologies of absence*, then there is no hope for ever finding a beginning, end or final commentary upon absence. Indeed, it is the very 'problem of absence' which leads to the sheer impossibility of ever finding an end or beginning; absence may never be touched, seen or spoken of in and of itself, and so, we are left chasing and chancing upon the traces left with the landscape as it withdraws. Absence *is* unsettling, it *is* open ended, and it calls for innovative experimental and new ways of writing it into landscape narratives. But, it is also exciting, there are always more possibilities afforded upon encountering these traces of absence within the landscape. As such, this chapter is not an attempt to offer a 'final closure' on the idea of absence through a set of specific methodologies. Instead it is meant as one more encounter in the process of offering a formalisation and commentary on some of the multiple absences. Demonstrating and suggesting *some* of the ways it may be possible to become more receptive to absence within contemporary landscape narratives.

## V      Evanescence: stormy pasts

All the things that have disappeared... but yet they remain, remain in the past, exist in the past.  
But what precisely do we mean and understand by saying something exists in the past?  
Anthony Frewin – 2006:459.

### Introduction

There is a quiet homeliness about promenade. I must have walked along it hundreds of times. From childhood, toddling up and down stabilised by the tension of the reins, illumination walks swaddled in warm winter clothes protected against the bitter elements, summer day trips with Grandma and Grandad, games of 'tig', long walks bent double to fend off the stinging horizontal rain, drives along the front after weary days spent in the fresh sea air.

The events in and around Blackpool have been meticulously stored and documented, black and white photographs with their edges battered and curled as fingers have regularly fumbled through them to reminisce. There is a slight fuzziness to all the stories; memories distorted and blurred by amnesia, thick layers of dust collecting upon unexplored thoughts leaving only the most poignant episodes to remain; day trips or summers spent living by the coast, the all important two week summer holiday each year: *"It didn't matter how poor we were, we saved like mad to give you children a holiday... every week we saved, not missing a week, all year"*. Hazy memories emerge triggered through the holiday snaps, recounting of tales and thoughts, to summon-forth the particular ambience of Blackpool: The unique, all-pervading smell of oily fish and frying chips, sounds of the laughing man, or the intense atmosphere created by the plateau of precariously wedged coppers in the slot machines, a single nudge away from the satisfying clink of winning.

Blackpool, as with all places, is steeped in history. To me, it is personal. There are thousands of narratives entwined, merging and woven, each leaving their own trace upon the landscape. As such, it is a multiple; locally it is not individuated, globally not summed up (Serres, 1995:4). I have no idea where its individual sites or points of narrative may be, if or how separate scenes and landscape connect up. I have only the feeblest conception of its internal interactions, the lengthiness and entanglement of its connections and relations, and only the vaguest idea of its environment. However, from the collection of fragments I have about Blackpool, I will aim to spin a tale of disappearance, the drawing back of particular events, presences and absences which, for whatever reason, have etched and coursed themselves deep into the landscape. We *should* reclaim these traces through narratives to dispel the negative connotations of their absence and passivity from the landscape which shrouds them. These memories foreground alternative ways of knowing and speaking about how and where things should be situated, they transgress boundaries between inside and outside, human and non-human, ineffable and retrievable. More generally, they spell out the plethora of absences manifested in the landscape; aporetic, lost, haunting, contingent, circulatory and so forth. These absences are like silent poles of attraction, the constant provocation and calling, always circling towards the other and yet never quite touching it. By engaging with

these, or denoting the movement away and towards the multiple absences, new ways of considering landscape and subjectivity will come about allowing us to be open to the new impossible possibilities and constant potentialities.

Blackpool is a landscape punctuated with multitudes of markers, each capable of prompting memory, leading to unfurling tales and anecdotes. This narrative will weave together instances of decay, damage, loss, vulnerability, disappearance and absence set within the landscape. But this should not be seen in a negative light; rather the disappearance of these moments is merely the transition of some thing from “is there” to “is not there” (Ophir, 2005:41). This distinct layering of permeable traces describes and binds us to the landscape of Blackpool. Every moment leaves its trace or marker, whether scratches in a surface, a story, a lingering smell or a memory, and it is these traces which show the transition and movement between presence and absence. Many of the places and events in and of Blackpool have evaporated, or just changed beyond recognition; those of us who are here and bear witness to these traces have a duty almost to those who are absent to read the traces and to call to presence a new narrative combining these sometimes almost imperceptible trails. This section will create a hermeneutic journey through Blackpool’s otherwise forgotten or unknown nooks and crannies, paying tribute and evoking the traces of those stories which were laid down in the past. In the following chapter the narratives will begin to entwine and engage with the more hidden and concealed narratives, those which are *not* recoverable, the ancient and immemorial.

In some ways, this telling of ‘events as events’ in Blackpool is similar to Wylie’s (2002b) unfolding ensemble of geographical and historically specific practices and subjectives in the Antarctic landscape; exposing and recreating threads and histories which weave through Blackpool’s landscape. The narratives will present the landscape through a series of movements from presence to absence and vice versa, depicting the landscape as a mosaic of instances, whether detailing specific events, stories, souvenirs, pictures or moods and these disappearances from the wider landscape. The narrative does not intend to give either a linear history of the development of the area as a tourist centre, or of its demise since the 1950s: Similarly, as I have only fragmentary information on this multiplicity I can not give a ‘complete’ account of Blackpool, indeed it is of the very condition of a town to be plural with multiple stories and an inexhaustibility of narratives, peopled with strangers and difference (Pinder, 2001:2).

This narrative of Blackpool, in lieu of other nonrepresentational research, begins with landscape “not as an object of presence which needs to be explained, but a presence whose object-like appearance needs to be thought” (Rose, 2006:538). Thought-into-being as a form of presence through physical, tactile and sensory processes of holiday time, whether in the past, present or imminent future. Such a thinking-into-being involves an unfolding of landscape and self through a reciprocal movement, whereby the landscape-object, that which is posited as ‘such and such’, for



example 'holiday-town', 'destination' or simply 'Blackpool', undergoes an act which combines "expression with gaze (as well as listening and – more rarely – taste and smell) and contact or touch" (Ophir, 2005:62). Through the double-evolution of self and landscape unfolded through physical, tactile and sensory experiences, the object becomes lived *through* rather than simply viewed (Serres, 1995:7). Yet landscape and self should not necessarily be seen as "actual stable or pre-given presences" (Wylie, 2007a:212), instead 'dreams of presence' mark an imagination of, and a movement towards presence" (Rose, 2006:538). The figure wandering along the prom, staring at the wreck or transfixed by the slot machines is no longer a subject *a priori* projecting an intelligible structure of meaning upon the landscape. Instead it is a subject assembled and performed in the practice of tourist, voyeur or gambler (Wylie, 2002a). Each instance in which a landscape has been brought to presence, or indeed, when the landscape brings the self to present, at that moment of experience or excitation, a trace is configured in material and immaterial structures. By unpacking and exploring these traces of gentle ebbing of presences and absences accumulated over time, it is possible to weave a narrative which explores the presence of absence within the landscape.

### The Turning Tide

The tide is going out; the waves gently pile in one after another simultaneously drawing back. Water and sea. Perceptual bursts of movement, inner and outer, how can each wave be told apart? (Serres, 1995:6). Layer upon layer of gently foaming water, merging to surge almost silently across the soft



undulating sands. The placid cadenza, their incessant chuckle dissipates into the broader seaside acoustic. Established for eternity; limitless, continuous, unending, unchanging. The trickling waves constantly affirm the expanse of the sea with their distinctive hush, rushing up the shoreline, before drawing traces of their own demise, blending invisibly back into the watery mass.

We wandered along the promenade, the dreary concrete slabs stretching what seemed endlessly before us. The front almost silent except for the constant lull of the withdrawing sea; the tranquil acoustic occasionally punctuated by the raucous call of gulls or hiss of bike tyres as cyclists periodically glided by. It's strange to imagine this stretch packed with holidaying families, the Lancashire working man, individuals seeking health, rest and self-improvement, and those on holidays of novelty and entertainment (Walton, 1978:36). The pre-formed concrete benches are now left cold and unoccupied, the smooth boulders arranged in giant steps where usually families would congregate to admire the view, sit to eat picnics or simply rest, now lie bare. Ambling along



the promenade seeing these banal absences shows not only a holiday town out-of-season, but also provides a sense of looking across a broad historical depth. History is in the midst of this landscape; “commonly lived, uneasily thought, it is, as it happens, information neither total nor null, without a clear-cut boundary between the observer and the observed” (Serres, 1995:6). The multiple stories and inexhaustible narratives woven as threads and written in traces saturate the landscape and continuously circulate, creating something spectral

which jostles amid a shifting present (Pinder, 2001).

The present is disrupted by the off-beat hemiolios of spectral movement which seeks to haunt and disrupt the landscape in other dimensions and time frames: “The phantoms lie about the past whilst spectres gesture towards a still unformulated future” (Davis, 2007:14). The Promenade was originally a coastal path linking Bispham to Layton, a rough track later developed into a more permanent cobbled path; to engineers, it is the sea defence slowly eroding in its own geological time frame; to my mother, a place to retreat when the tide was in, filled with other holidaymakers all connected to the cycle of tide’s surging temporality. The Promenade’s being-there conceals its own disappearance and that of other things relating to it, moving between presence and absence through a series of different temporalities (Ophir, 2005:50). Wylie (2005) drawing from Derrida (1994) notes, the walker, or indeed any figure in the landscape, “is poised between the country ahead and the country behind, between one step and the next, epiphany and penumbra, he or she is, in other words, spectral; between there and not there, perpetually caught in an apparitional process of arriving/departing” (pp.237). The constantly shifting perspective or emergence and spectralisation opens all sorts of possibilities, the fusion of new-old worlds caught up in the movement of presence to absence and back again; “always coming back. To haunt the landscape... to supplement and disturb it” (2005:246).

These spectral instances are created through a series of absences, their traces jostling and present amid the landscape. Within their weaving movement there is double movement of history at play; traces are the presence of some thing, referring to another presence already gone. Simultaneously, they also move within a wider web of signification; thousands of dissolving traces enmeshed within a progressively loosening and dissipating network; here, the distinction of “name as the trace and the name of the trace” becomes critically important (Ophir, pp.53).

Within this double movement of history and traces there is no singular monologue or testimony to the past; narratives are entangled, contested, resisted and ruptured. Working through

Susan Stewart's (1993) consignment of objects as either 'collection' or 'souvenir' helps to resolve this polemic to a certain extent. A 'collection' consists of a group of objects accumulated in one location; around Blackpool, the piers, the Tower, the Promenade and so forth could constitute this. These particular objects do not align precisely to Stewart's definition of 'collection' in that they have not been specifically amassed by an individual or group, and do not exist solely through their organisation, yet, the use of the 'collection' offers suitable basis to demonstrate the diametrically opposed nature of traces weaving through the landscape of past and present. Any 'collection' seeks to form a 'self-enclosure' through ahistoricism. Broadly speaking, this ahistoricism is part of a 'fixed' or 'official' history simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world. It is a history which binds itself strictly to its own temporal continuities, to progressions and relations between things; a history which is reconstructed, a vast intertextuality between the reference points assembled to stretch processes of memory across space – "always problematic and incomplete" (Nora, 1989:9). This 'collection' in its ahistorical form can be likened to a bold, linear line traced through specific events in a progressive fashion, where memory is increasingly organised according to 'heritage' (Edensor, 2005a:133). Within this, the past performs and services the present through specific events lending it authenticity; the endurance of the collection serves as testimony to the historical lineage and temporalisation imbued within the landscape.

Alternatively, 'souvenir' from the Latin *sub-venire* means 'to come up'. Souvenirs are composed of transient evidence, history manufactured from 'material survivals'. Souvenirs are fragments of the past; photographs, newspaper articles, branded paraphernalia and so forth; items which incongruously survive into the present, circulating and betraying, forming the interstices in history's bold line: "The master narrative gives way to the more fragmented, situated stories of people" (Stewart, 1996:107). The present now becomes enveloped within the past, creating inconsistencies within the landscape and the souvenir becomes an enactment of *disappearance*: Traces which can always be evoked and brought to present, always already visible, authenticating the past and discrediting the present.

The souvenir ruptures the collection's diachronically ordered temporality, offering a void which marks a radical separation between past and present. These transient souvenirs are the moment at which history may be privatised or manipulated to fit into the 'fixed-official' history; "history then becomes a chronotope" (Stewart, 1996:112). That is, history as the spatio-temporal matrix, governing the base condition of all narratives. And it is here, the infusion of such narratives entwined about the base condition of history that the imperceptible ebbing of spectral movement from absence to presence and presence to absence takes place.



A strong and cool gust blasts from North to South tussling debris and rubbish the length of the Promenade. Overhead, the sky a brilliantly intense hue of blue, sporadically dotted with



voluptuous white clouds suspended up until the horizon. The scent of summer is in the air. Despite the clear-skies and the promisingly summery ambience, the winter holds the landscape its icy grip monopolising the coast. The promenade is deserted and the atmosphere is laden with elusive and fragmentary history; it remains taut and compelling. They are coming back. I suppress a shiver as a chill runs the full length of my spine.

### **The Candle in the Window**

**Told by Allen Clarke, 1908**

On a stormy June evening in the early half of the Nineteenth Century [11<sup>th</sup> June, 1833], in the time of William IV., “the sailor King,” when there were only about three hundred houses in Blackpool, no finest sea Promenade in the world, but only a white-railed walk along the green cliffs, no piers, no palaces of entertainment, no steamboats, and not even a railway into the Fylde – there came striding over Beryl Hill, at North Shore, from the direction of Rossall, through roaring wind and hissing showers of rain, the Reverend John Haythorn, Minister at the Parish Church on the top of the slope in the village that was beginning to be prosperously popular as a bathing place and holiday resort.

Parson Haythorn, a tall, thin man, of about thirty, with a pale sensitive face, made down the grassy cliff to the white-walled hostelry, known as the Gynn Inn – “gynn,” or “gin,” meaning “road to the sea” – standing at the head of a gully of cleft between the clay hillocks, that constitute a natural barrier against the ocean.

The gale dashed the rain against the windows of the Inn, and up the corridor as he opened the door and stepped inside. Hastily thrusting the door to, he had to push with all his strength to close it again.

“Let me have something to drink, Billy. I’m wet through and cold. This is a queer day for June, isn’t it?”

“We’re never sure o’ the weather i’ this part of the world,” said the landlord, bringing a glass of warm wine and taking a seat by the parson against the little window overlooking the sea.

“Any visitors in?” asked Parson Haythorn.

“Nobbut a twothree – it’s three weeks off the gradely season yet – an’ them’s gone up th’ beach to look at some wreck they say there is on the South Shore.”

"There's a wreck, true enough," said the Parson, "I've seen it, and I'm afraid it's not the only one. This will be a disastrous day along the coast, Billy. There were three vessels in difficulties, blown helplessly along by the south-west gale."

"It's been a terrific thunderstorm," said Snape, "an' come on so sudden, too. From' th' looks o' this mornin' nobody would have expected what we've had this afternoon."

### Storm Stricken



The weather was slowly drawing in, the day was darkening; in the distance sweeping bands of rain blacken the sky. As we turned the corner around Bispham, the *Riverdance* came into view, her giant bulk protruding from the sand rather like a beached whale, forlorn and helpless on the shoreline. The now gasping hull had been churned ruthlessly in the ocean during the January tempests; 70 mile per hour winds

had dragged and chopped at the ocean, forcing the surface to swell into huge undulating crests. Peaks and troughs of foaming water had continuously assaulted her bow causing her to list and twist onto her side before skewering her off course towards the shoreline. In a final indignant act, a freak wave lunged and struck the *Riverdance*, upturning her before discarding her carcass on the beach, leaving her open and susceptible to other elements.

As we moved closer to the ship, the afternoon's gloom lifted slightly, her hull illuminated by sun's dying rays forced through a slight opening in the brooding clouds. She is no longer befriended by the sea, but instead undermined by the action of the salty waters freely rolling in and out of her upturned keel, corroding and gently eating away.

A profound sense of sadness overcame me; there is a raw unjustness about the scene. No possibility of return, no ability to right her or to set her afloat. This inability, rusting and steady demise articulates a progressive orientation towards some lack; a calling for help. She slowly slumps and sinks further in the sand, the constant movement and procession towards absence in a slow and painful withdrawal. Her subjectivity is unfailingly realised; the gap between the presence of *Riverdance* as a ferry and her presence as a wreck opens.

For now though, this overturned hull has become a pole of identity for the tourist voyeurs; crowds have been attracted in their thousands to see the wreck, pages of photographs and reportage dedicated to her. The veritable sea of memorabilia composed of traces surrounding the

*Riverdance* is the only things keeping her afloat. A fascination with damage and decay; a ruin which continues to exist in the sphere of life even though life has departed from it. A fragment from an earlier age, the decomposition of consciousness and existence. New aspects – unknown, denied, or forgotten – are discovered (Ophir, pp.96).

These archives emphasise the picturesque, where the sublime is allied to a sense of melancholia; astonishment seizing and occupying the staring masses, the effect of the sublime in its highest degree (Burke, 1757 [1999:64]). It is their astonishment, admiration, reverence and respect which draws the crowd to this ruin. This wreck emblematic of the cycle of life and death, symbolic of the inevitability of life passing, of a future in which obsolescence is certain and the inexorable processes of nature dispassionately takes its toll on all things. For humans, the natural world is the home to which our bodies and buildings ultimately return, despite the pretensions to immortality we perhaps possess (Edensor, 2005a:11).

Previously, the *Riverdance* had been almost imperceptible to these holidaying masses, silently gliding along the horizon each day on its journey from Northern Ireland to Heysham. Now it is the subject of one-thousand lips, the taste of *Terry's Ice cream Parlour's* newest flavour, the *Gazette's* most searched for story and beach's most popular attraction. In the transition and withdrawal of the *Riverdance* from ship to wreck there was a substantial development of new interested parties attracted to the representation of what was lost. These parties, including myself, have 'acquired' in retrospect what was lost, and have joined the circle of *those-who-lose* (Ophir, 2005:108).

Despite this attention and immortalisation of the loss, there still remains a marching departure towards her yet more diluted subject position; the intimations of transience are far from absent. Headlines reading 'constructive loss', 'could be cut up', 'demolition experts begin' note a transgression, the final blurring of boundaries and the inevitability of death and decay (Edensor, 2005a:15). A twinge of pain. An unutterable sadness. Her cargo is removed, her innards gutted. Slowly and expertly she is stabilised and then cut up, before being taken away for scrap. Her only presence left to remain will be traced through her name murmured on the lips of those who want to remember.



The landlord glanced towards the door of the room, "Here's our Mary," and there entered the chamber a comely maiden with the bloom of the Fylde in her face, and the vigour of its breezes and the grace of its waves in her form.

"Father," she said, "our Jim's just come in at the back door, and he says there's a wreck on the South Shore, but the men are all saved."

"So Mesthur Haythorn's just been tellin' me," said Snape. "Our Mary," he went on, turning to the parson, "is rayther anxious when there's wrecks about. There's a certain young fellow, Bob Bamber, o' Bispham, on a certain sloop, th' "Rose and Thistle," tradin' between Liverpool and Scotland, or some other foreign heathen place --- Mary and Bob are to be married when Bob returns fro' this voyage," said Snape.

"Oh, I remember," said the parson, "you mentioned it to me the other week. And when are you expecting Bob back?"

"Any day now," said Snape, "that's why Mary is so anxious o'er this storm. Bob's boat is very likely eaut on that sea this very minute. Mary feared that th' wreck at South Shore might be Bob's boat."

"Ah, I understand," said Parson Haythorn, "But let me reassure Mary that it was not Bob's vessel. I saw the men brought ashore this afternoon. It was an Irish boat – a crew of wild fellows who gave no thanks to God for their deliverance, but started drinking as soon as they were safe ashore."

"Happen that's their way o' showin' thanks," said Snape with a smile, "a sort o' rejoicing like. We've aw eaur different ways, yo' know."

"A sinful way," said Mr. Haythorn, "I am sure that if after a perilous tossing on a sea of tempest, expecting death every instant, I was rescued from a watery grave, my first act would be, not to get hold of a pot of ale, but to go down on my knees and thank God for His mercy and my deliverance."

"Theer's another rumble of thunder," said Snape, standing up and looking through the window, down which the rain was pouring. "It's gooin' father off; sounds away tort th' Isle o' Man, now. Look what a wild sae – what a terrific commotion o' wayter!"

"Who would think such an afternoon could follow such a morning?" said the minister. "Summer this morning; winter this afternoon."

"That's sometime th' case at Blackpool," said Snape.

Jim, the landlord's son, a year or two younger than Mary, came into the room with two visitors, a lady and a gentleman, who were setting off to catch the Preston coach.

"Well, Jim," said Snape, "be getting' off – or they'll miss th' coach. I'm sorry it's not a better day for travellers."



“Yes, it’s dreadful; and these wrecks, too” said the gentleman. “I’ve been to see the one on the South Shore. There’s another wreck come ashore opposite the old Fox Hall farm, too, and another in from of Cuthbert Nickson’s Hotel.”

“And the crews?” asked Parson Haythorn.

“No trace of them,” said the gentleman, “they must have all perished. Poor fellows!”

“Heaven rest their souls,” said the minister.

Mary looked troubled. Perhaps her lover, he who was soon to have been her husband, had been on one of those boats that had gone down. The dusk and the dark came soon, with no abating of the fury of wind and sea.

~



We waited all afternoon until the tide had withdrawn as far down the beach as the controlling moon would allow. Underfoot the sand was still damp with reductive, gently undulating traces left by the unabating action of the waves, the pattern further inscribed and overlain with footprints. The traces depicting the presence of both water and people before us, each inscribing their own distinct patterning on the malleable sand; working within a wider web of differences. We wandered along the beach, drawn towards decaying ruin of *Riverdance*.

Moving around the beach I ducked, weaved and crouched, trying to capture the best angle to photograph the slow and painful demise of her hull. Nearby, we stumbled across what looked like a series of fence posts knocked into the beach in a regular, symmetrical pattern. Stepping back, it became increasingly obvious that the decaying stumps protruding from the shallow waters were not fence posts at all, but in fact the ribs of the underbelly of another ship. We were in a graveyard.

### All at Sea

The December weeks of 1894 were harsh, perhaps the most brutal of what had already been a particularly severe winter; the last few days leading up to Christmastide proved no exception. “It is safe to say that most people on the coast passed a sleepless night” reported one local newspaper on the eve



of Christmas Eve, “some even hid in cellars for fear the chimney pots crashing through their roof” (Sharples, *Herald Weekly Series*, 1972). “The weather had been wild and stormy for some days,” another witness wrote thirty-four years later, “great damage was done along the coast, chimney pots by the hundred being whirled off and innumerable windows being blown out” (unknown source, reported in Myerscough, *The Blackpool Evening Gazette*, 1968). “Blackpool looked as if it had suffered a bombardment. Walls and gables were swaying or falling. Huge gaps appeared in roofs” (reported Mummery, *The Blackpool Evening Gazette*, 1975).

The *Abana* with her 500 tonne ballast aboard and crew of 17 left Liverpool harbour bound for Florida on the 21<sup>st</sup>. It was the start of a cold and hazy day, yet despite the brutal season the wind remained uncharacteristically light. A gentle South-Easterly force carried the *Abana* swiftly across Liverpool Bay. By the evening the crew had sighted Chicken Rock, south of the Isle of Man, good progress was being made. The tide was at half-ebb, drawing back to expose the frozen beach. A cold chill rested in the night air, hinting of the thickening of weather.

The wind swung.  
 South-easterly.  
 South-westerly.  
 An incessant unleashing.  
 Gust after gust.  
 Progressively building.  
 The ship slewed round on a starboard tack.



The sea was restless, the shifting tones and timbres of the swell surrounded the vessel, encircling, smacking, frothing. New shapes and forms began breaking forth, surging against the hull forcing the bowsprit high into the night sky, before allowing it to return to pound the surface with a great boom. Smashing and splashing cold, stinging spray. The steady building of the elements constantly revealing new strengths.

Then a lull. The middle of the vortex. Breaths of air are rather like life to the sea, without a breeze to bring it to life the sea lies cold, flat and indifferent. It needs the wind to write on it, to stir it up, to make waves (Serres, 1993:33). It was a momentary calm.

A slow drawing-in of breath.

Then it began to howl.

Whipping up and tousling the surface into a thousand irregular foaming beasts, the turbulent and taunting sea with arborescent waves reared and bellowed. The *Abana* was buffeted across Liverpool bay back towards the Welsh coastline, enthralled by the aeolian forces. Onboard, six of the crew scaled the dizzying heights of the mainmast, swinging to and fro in a sickeningly irregular pendulum movement. Sails were tightened in and stowed, later only to be torn to shreds, ripping off into the blackness. The wind freshened further to a gale force, gusting up to a hundred miles per hour, blasting its icy-tones merciless to anything in its path. The wind fuelled with fury, raged and howled. The ship surged past the tip of northern Anglesey. Whipping gusts flailed out, insane and unpredictable.

The night sky was illuminated with bifurcating forks of lightening, the splaying fingers throwing the shoreline into momentary brightness, the land a vivid silhouette, a snaking horizon reaching out in the distance; both part of the world and yet equally always beyond it. Both there and never there, never quite graspable or completely comprehensible. The subject without character or quality; fragile, trembling always suspended (Serres, 1995:42). Another fork sparking across the sky. A thundering passage. Heightened senses, the world a-tremble. The horizon flickered once more at the edge of existence; constantly elusive inhabiting the point of presence and absence (Metcalf, 2001:261). Racing gusts churn up the sea; the grasp of the perfect hurricane.



Parson Haythorn, after a walk through the little town to see if his Church was safe, he said, returned to the Gynn and reported much damage was done; roofs torn off houses and windows blown in, and the beach strewn with wreckage. "I could hardly get along for the wind," he said. "On the cliffs near Cuthbert Nickson's hotel the force of the gale was tremendous. I was carried off my feet, and clung to a bathing van – and suddenly that was blown clean over. Only by a marvel did I escape being under it. The tide's coming in hugely; half Blackpool will be flooded to-night, and tons of cliffs dashed down. If the sea continues encroaching and making havoc as it has done lately the whole cliffs will be gone in a generation or two. The folks are barricading their windows and plastering up the doors with clay. I'm afraid that in the morning the shore will be littered with destruction. God help all souls at sea this night!"

The landlord and the parson, and Jim, who had now returned, and two or three visitors, sat in the parlour fronting the sea. Through the unblinded window they could see the gloom of

the night and the foam surging through it like ghosts. The room was feebly lit by a candle on the table.

Then in came Mary, full of suppressed agitation; a strange look on her face.

"What ails thee, Mary, lass?" asked her father.

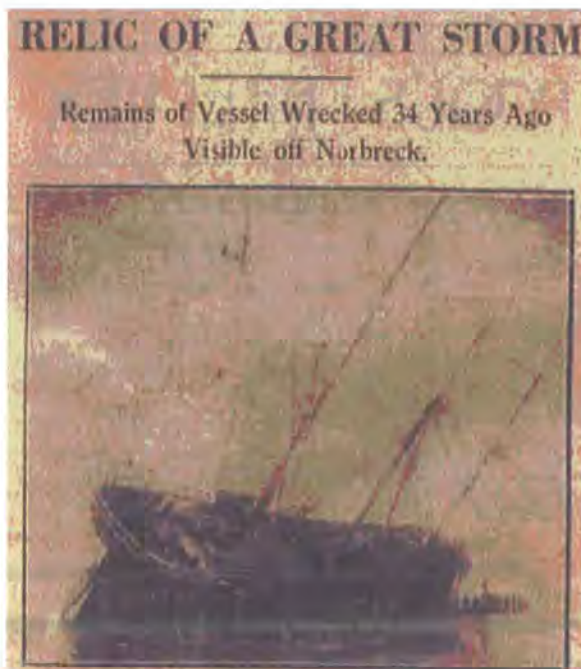
She made no answer, but went and stood by the window, peering out into the awful night.

~

At sea the storm continued to lash at the oceans, the winds whipping remorselessly. The mizzen and fore t'gallant sails were torn away. The crew had no option but to run with the wind; blown backwards and forwards in the midst of the wild Irish Sea. The impetuous winds unceasing.

Dawn broke. The hazy greyness of morning with its almost formless fog, faint and fluctuating with gentle nuances brought no rest. Still the wind did not abate. The *Abana* followed with the wind, blasted which ever way it pleased. Like a weathervane, unstable in both point and direction, fluctuating amid the tumultuous currents. The vessel is blank, it tells any direction the gusts chose to blow, at any given moment it has just one single direction (Serres, 1995:64). The wind aroused once more; storm-tossed and wave-lashed the crew had no option but to run with the bursts. Surge upon surge of invisible gusts pounded the vessel, their only trace a mere darkened shadow on the already turbulent surface.

In rapid succession, the masts were stripped one by one of their sails; mainsail, lower topsail, fore upper topsail. Sails and blocks taken, the remaining canvas left cracking with unbearable violence, whips of sails beating against nude masts. Only one sail remained.



## RELIC OF A GREAT STORM

Remains of Vessel Wrecked 34 Years Ago  
Visible off Norbreck.

The rough seas roused again, bringing new gusts afresh. The fore lower topsail was mercilessly ripped from the mast, dislocating the yard arm, tossing it into the midst of the raging tempest. The crew were left only with the rigging, bare and naked of its sails, of little use to drive or steer the vessel to safety. She was vulnerable and open to power of the wind and waves.

The wind was driving the *Abana* in shore; was this a moment of luck?

A vessel loomed on the starboard side, it was the Morecambe Bay lightship, they were getting dangerously close to land. The gear was



cut away, and the port anchor dropped to sure up the vessel, affirming her positioning just off the coast, waiting in hope for a little respite to sit out the remainder of the storm.

The grinding sound of metal upon metal, the metallic clang as the anchor is released from its chains of bondage. The ship pitched and whiled unsteadily. The anchor is dropped; the cable charges almost possessed overboard, following the anchor into the unknown depths. The one chance to disable the storm's monopoly over the vessel, to hold her still, to repossess control.

The anchor fouls and goes off at a tangent. She slips her cable and surrenders to the fluctuations of the sea. The line attaching anchor to boat plummets into the depths following the dead-weight. It's fragile links clank across the deck. The chain is breaking, it is breaking at every point, it may always break, its characteristic is to snap. It is fragile, unstable, only as strong as its weakest link (Serres, 1995:71).

Chaos. Noise. Nausea. The *Abana* continues to reel and churn in the shallow waters.

A sudden jolt. There is a pause, a caesura. A groan, then a creak.

Despite the incessant howling of the storm there is a momentary cessation. The distinction shifts from boat *in* storm to boat *and* storm. Chaos and order momentarily separate. The storm then tightens its grip once more.

She slams forwards. With a further jolt she ploughs into Shell Wharf, a shallow sand plateau disguised under the still pounding waves. She is dragged and rammed further inshore, her hull scrapping along the sands. More creaking and groaning as the timbers of her hull protest vocally.

With one final utterance of pain and grief the vessel comes to a standstill, her deck reeling almost perpendicular to the sea, waves still overpowering and smashing onto the aching timbers.<sup>6</sup>



The sea was roaring loudly, the wind whistling and shrieking round the inn; the doors and windows rattling; at times the whole building shook and shivered.

"I shouldn't be surprised if the tide knocks at our door to-night, Billy," said Mr. Haythorn.

Suddenly, Mary spoke in a curious unusual tone, "I hear voices," she said, starting out down the "Gynn" towards the weird blackness of the water, "I hear voices – praying for help. I hear Bob's voice."

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<sup>6</sup> When sailing as Cook's Assistant on *Prince William* the Tall Ships Youth Trust's 60m square rigged brig, we were unfortunate enough to run aground whilst leaving the harbour of Fredrikstad, Sweden. The sound of the hull hitting solid bedrock at the bottom of the channel is a noise I will never forget. Time stopped momentarily. There was shunting groan as she lurched forward, then came to a stand still. The crew then spent the next hour fighting against the receding tide to float once more. Engineers emptied the water tanks in the hope she would float higher, the Captain tried to hold her steady whilst barking orders and trying to calm the rising levels of anxiety, on the bridge we took constant bearings, the hull groaned and whined. After a chaotic hour, she came free of her own accord, dragged and set adrift by the fluxing tide. We returned to harbour where she was checked by divers; there were no cracks or fractures. Two days later we successfully managed to leave Fredrikstad harbour before returning across a rather stormy North Sea to the UK.

"Nay, 'tis but the voice of the waters and the cries of the wind, Mary," said the minister, standing up and looking through the window with her.

"I see a vessel storm-tossed," said Mary – "her mast broken – her sail in tatters."

"Imagination, Mary," said the minister. "There is nothing to be seen but the dark."

Mary turned round, went to the table, picked up the candle and set it in the window.

"What's tha' done that for?" asked her father.

"I hardly know," she answered, "but if there is any stricken ship out there, the light will be a guide to the poor fellows on board."

She stood behind the candle, looking out to the sea in the grim night.

"Mary, lass," said her father, "thou'rt upset thinkin' o' Bob. Tha'd better go to bed."

She made no reply, but still gazed out into the waters of the night.

"One can see nothing but spray and spume," said Parson Haythorn, "it's spattering the window like melting snow, Billy; the sea's almost at the door. See, there's a gigantic rolled right up to the horse-block."

"Let it come," said Snape, "it'll noan shift th' Gynn Inn."

"Do not boast," said the minister; and as he spoke Mary cried out, "See! see!" – her eyes full of amazement.

"By Heaven, Billy!" cried the minister, "there's a boat at the door! Her bow sprit is almost touching the window!" [the *Lerwick*]

Hastily the men ran out into the night and found a sloop driven right up the fissure called "the Gynn." The crew were quickly rescued, and amongst them was Bob Bamber – Mary's sweetheart, who, along with his ship-mates, was soon sitting dried and warm, in the cosy parlour of the inn, and, with his arm round Mary's waist, telling the take of the night's thrilling and dismal experiences.

The captain, a Scotchman, said the boat had been buffeted all the afternoon, and when the dark came they counted themselves lost, in despair they began to pray – and then they suddenly saw a light, steered for it, and rose up the little creek in safety.

### **Evanesence**

Picture the scene unfolding before my eyes; the rotting underbelly of the *Abana* seated only paces away from the stark protruding body of the *Riverdance*. Picture the slow dissipation of the two hulls in their varying temporalities of decay, slowly being worn and eroded further into their

aqueous graves (Edensor, 2005a:16). Picture the sea rolling in, the sun's final rays picking up the subtle textures of the surface which constantly stirs in its dance of mimetic excess. Picture the throngs of tourists gathering to see this rupture in the normative mode of order, to view these ruins tossed out of place and destroyed by the cruel excess of the ocean.

The ruins by nature are regarded as unsightly and excessive, they contravene our usual sense of perspective, forming a strange silence which draws attention like magnetic poles, their constant provocation and silent call of disappearance drawing in the crowds. They act as heterotopias; the affectual field circulating throughout the uncanny scene evokes a peculiar sensation, disrupting the "normative procedures through which space is represented and categorised" (Edensor, 2005a:63). The heterotopia also forms a wider nonrepresentational space; "the very otherness disturbs speech and dissolves myths in which limits are shattered and language is brought to the threshold of impossibility" (Edensor, citing Stanley, 1996:43). They are like a puncture in the canvas, they break the continuous flow of the landscape; "an impasse rather than a junction, these figures disconnect the connected, make discontinuous the continuous" (Harrison, *forthcoming*:13).



Picture this beach once submerged under a mass of tumultuous waves, churning and convulsing, the wind whipping, the sky muted and heavy with clouds. These are the absent presences detectable only through the wrecks, a collection of fragments "through which things appear oblique and yet powerful as to what they are and what they can be" (Stewart, 1996:51). The carcasses conjure up

various histories evocative of a range of memories, testifying both to the past, and to the natural temporalities imposed by decay written through the ecological life cycles of non-human life forms. The space around the wrecks becomes replete with indeterminacy, immanent and ineffable feelings and countless conjectures and potentialities (Edensor, 2005a:93).

These are monuments inscribing and demarcating moments of past whilst simultaneously gesturing towards a yet unformulated future. They are the impulse which compels us to think of the impossible, "the thinking of the impossible possible, of the possible *as* impossible, of an impossible-possible that can no longer be determined by the metaphysical interpretation of possibility" (Rose, 2006:542, citing Derrida, 2002). These are the 'dreams of presence' which

describe how such impossible possibilities happen; “to account for how things (human or otherwise) exist without recourse to their history or a knowledge of their potential. It is the dream of a world that is explicable and accountable, a dream where we know who we are and what kind of world we belong to” (Rose, 2006:544).

These dreams of presence are orientations which allow subjectivity to occur; they understand the cultural landscape as an unfolding place of sensory affective or perceptual markers: The uncanny and peculiar aura, the shifting mood, tenor, colour and intensity (Wylie, 2005:236) of the atmosphere on the beach is engendered by the slowly fading corpses of the *Riverdance* and the *Abana*. A tension of irrevocable destruction; where the cogency of landscape lies exactly in this creative tension (Wylie & Rose, 2006:475). Dreams of presence which are orientated to the face of the other, to the unknowable alterity and to the anxious emptiness it presents (Rose, 2006:547). Dreams of presence which establish a need to explore the landscape “not as something that represents or reflects identity, but rather as something that makes identity possible” (Rose, pp.548).

Perhaps then, it is the sense of melancholia and mourning marking the irretrievable loss of the ships which make our identity possible. The sense of desolate dysphoria that distinguishes us as survivor-subjects haunted by these ghosts of the past (Davis, 2007:129). These ships and stories do not completely demarcate loss; the subjects retain a certain residual agency, they are marked



through traces; the presence of their hulls, news reportage, anecdotes, memories and so forth. “What is present refers to what is absent, and what is absent has disappeared, is being disappeared; if disappearance is present, that is only because the presence of something is fading, something is departing” (Ophir, 2005:55). These fading traces and this withdrawal from presence produces an interpretative space of unanswered questions and amassed effects; there is always more to say, the constant circling towards the absent other which produces a proliferation of traces. Such identifying traces testify to what has disappeared, for instance, the distinctive narrative of the *Abana*, of Parson Haythorn, Mary Snape and Bob Bamer, forming their own peculiar forms of dialogue. Their words, and my narrative of them, address the space of alterity formed whilst circling towards the absent other, “that process of always approaching from without but never arriving” (Levinas, 1981 cited in Stewart, 1996:67).

These wrecks and partial narratives embody absence, they are confined to a context of strict immanence, limited to the representation of ghostly apparitions. They haunt the imagination,

whisper inaudible lamentations and tremble in the expectation of impossible possibilities. They have become not a symbol of loss, but the embodiment of the process of remembering itself (Stewart, 1996:93). The paradox of loss is yet to come; when there is no one to testify and no one to mourn the loss.

When the loss itself is lost.



## VI Fragments: a (hi)story of Blackpool

All towns are geological; you cannot take three steps without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a *closed* landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us towards the past. Certain *shifting* angles allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary.

Gilles Ivain – 1953.

### Introduction

“Memory materialises in the body in movement, and, in doing so, ceases to be pure memory: it is lived in the present” (Game, 1991:97). Yet, imagine if this memory *could* not be materialised, if this memory was *never* re-lived, *could* never be re-lived. Imagine if the traces of memory were lost; if they circulated as an indescribable and uncanny aura, if there was no one to understand, testify or open a dialogue with this loss. Imagine if there was no method of understanding these fragmentary present absences, no way of crossing or breaching the liminal tension existing precisely at the limit of presence and no way of knowing this chain of unutterable secrets.

Here then arises the hermeneutic enigma, the mystery to the analytic gaze; fragments pieced together in the present are incised by indeterminate and elusory gaps which evade all recollection, representation and conceptualisation (Harrison, 2007a:591). As has already been established, Blackpool is steeped in history, thousands of entwined narratives coursing through the landscape; collections and relations some of which are present, the majority absent. Whilst some of these traces may be provoked and retold in the spirit of storytelling, bearing witness and temporarily ordering and dramatising the landscape to leave more evident traces, there is constant falling short. “At the ‘heart’ of these, the relational as it were, abides the absence of the nonrelational, as that which is silently called for, provoked, and continues to disturb and set in motion the relational” (Harrison, 2007a:592).

Throughout this chapter I will engage with the social history of Blackpool, that is, the ‘settled’, ‘official’ history, constitutively determined as a progression between various monumental and socially recognisable events and instances. History in this guise is the ‘chronotope’; the spatio-temporal matrix which almost rests upon the landscape from above, it is a series of focal points set in memorable images; for Blackpool this perhaps started with the first mapped recognition of the area, the opening of the first hotel, alongside developments allowing greater numbers of tourists to visit the area. It is the ‘grand history’ created through overriding structures and concepts thought to best represent and unite the identity of the people and place truthfully. Yet this history is constantly unsettled through the narratives it provides the basis for; it is fragmented by the situated stories of the very people it tries to order and categorise. Their narratives rise to importance as the “phantasmal rehabilitation of all lost frames of reference” (Foster, 1985, cited in Stewart, 1996:58). There is an unfolding of miniature histories, personal almost allegorical tales, occurring through

praxis; incising, disrupting and fragmenting the landscape, creating an unsettled mixture of presence, place, present and past (Wylie, 2007b). This unsettling merging and emerging of the dual narratives form spectral fusions within the landscape; it is a dual-evolution of history and subjectivity. Narratives and moments not vanishing or disappearing, but constantly haunting; always coming back to supplement and disturb the landscape (Wylie, 2005:246).

I will tell of some of these miniature histories via the recounting of memories, interspersed throughout the broader social history of Blackpool. Memories which take on a life of their own, indexing an extraordinary 'real' above and beyond the people who tell them, the events they describe and the situation of telling (Stewart, 1996:58). This 'real' marks the naturalised flow of sensory experience, the everyday playing out of events which weave and intersperse the grand narrative. These are the personal memories, testimonies almost, played out in a literary narrative which tells of the "extraordinary 'real'". Yet this story is marked by an incisive gap between the *pensum* and *punctum*, between memory and event, mind and body; it is a hiatus which plagues recollection, an interruption to the presence where certain details, feelings and intensities remain absent. These memories have a haunting presence; they speak to us of loss, of moments which may not completely be revoked. It is our inheritance of the past, memories which, through their incomplete presence, dislocate time and space, memory and history, unsettling our present.

The broad intellectual heritage of this chapter is based upon these haunting presences; it is a psychogeography which aims to blend an appreciation of landscape and subjectivity into ever further dimensions incorporating past, present and future. I will look at the falling short of recollection through the intertextualities of memory, and the slippages which occur between the numerous fragments that go into the composition and recomposition of that which is remembered and communicated (Edensor, 2005a:151). It will be an imaginative reconstruction entailing the search for lost memories; it will try to come close to understanding the space and tension between the discursive and figural language of ghosts embodied through their haunting presence. But this is not only a tale about the haunting of landscape through past events, it is also a literary memorial, haunted in itself. It is tormented by numerous spectres; disrupted by memories, events and histories, and unsettled through elusive illusions and phantasmagorical instances (Pile, 2005).

### *The pole howsys alias the north howsys*

Fylde was, for many years, a land of marshes and peat bogs. This *gefilde* or plain, a vast expanse of boggy quagmire layered upon blown sands and glacial boulder clays. From this basis Blackpool and the surrounding area evolved. Anglo-Saxon coupled with Scandinavian place names like *Layton-cum-Warbreck* and *Bispham-with-Norbreck* suggest the initial Anglo-Saxon population was joined via peaceful invasion by the Vikings around the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries. By the mediæval era, the landscape was divided between two principal manorial holdings, Bispham to the north and Layton in the south.



evidence that there was any resident population at this time, the place name may merely have been referring to the tidal stream outlet in the area.

In 1532 the first recognised map of the area labels a hamlet by this tidal stream outlet, *the pole howsys alias the north howsys* – a rough translation being *The 'Pul' [Blackpool] houses, the name given to the North houses*. By the 17<sup>th</sup> Century entries in the Bispham Parish Church records name the area 'Poole' or 'Blackpoole'. By 1630 at least four families were established, thought to be primarily engaged in farming. By the middle sixteenth century, the embryonic stages of the tourist trade were in motion; Bishop Pococke recorded 'accommodations' as early as 1750 for people who came to bathe (Historical Town Assessment Report, 2005). The first boarding house was thought to have been set up by Mrs. Whiteside who hailed from North Wales, her husband Edward realised the potential of her friendly and welcoming character alongside her culinary ability, and so opened his doors to paying guests. Soon, it was regarded as *the* place in Blackpool for the lower classes to lodge (Barritt, 1995:51). By the late 1700s the number of resident families in Blackpool rose to around seventeen (Smith, 1959) indicating the possibility that some economic benefit was being derived from visitors by the early eighteenth century.

#### Grand narratives: instantaneous memories

It is impossible to say when Blackpool's 'history' began; grand narratives generally state the need for significant economic standing and exchange. Yet perhaps this narrative could latch

Bispham, thought to mean the 'lands of the Bishop', was perhaps originally part of Athelstan's grant to York Minster as part of Amounderness in AD 937. Layton, to the south, was thought to be the daughter foundation to Bispham; it was established as a parish then later divided into moieties (Historic Town Assessment Report).

Blackpool itself is thought to have emerged as a series of farmsteads between these two manorial holdings. References to the area during the Mediæval period simply name the area *pul*, which is thought to have transpired through the discolouration and blackening of Spen Brook, the stream running out to the sea in this area through the peat marshes. This reference first appears in 1416, although there is no conclusive



onto the symbol on the map that first initiated the line of thought on Blackpool. That first 'labelling' of the hamlet in the thirteenth century: "launched from such a perch the story of history snaps into place as a litany of events in which one thing leads to another. It could be written as the beginning of progress on the coast, the opening of the place to development, change, opportunity" (Stewart, 1996:97).

Not only is it impossible to label the 'start' of history but there is also a distinct 'out-of-jointness' (Derrida, 1994) within time itself. Any 'grand narrative', or an 'official', 'settled' or dominant and socially recognisable history, is constantly cut across and interrupted by personal memories which flicker and flit to presence. This out-of-jointness stresses the disruptive potential of the 'not-quite-disposed-of' traces of the past; they may resurface at any point as instantaneous memories, spontaneously cutting across and ostracising the grand narrative. They graze and engrave upon the surface; the landscape, rather like Freud's *Mystical Writing Pad* (1925); not an indifferent surface like the chalkboard upon which you write then may erase, but rather one which receives the imprint of every group as traces incised upon its surface. Landscapes, like the wax of this pad, retain every trace of these ghostly fonts "legible in certain lights" (Freud, 1925:211); however it takes the initiative of an interested party to retrieve these traces from the past and reinstate them in the present.

This chapter is reliant upon such traces, for me, the interest arises when it becomes apparent that the traces are not always unified with their meanings; personal narratives may oppose the historically accepted facts, "a clash of epistemologies – ours and theirs" (Stewart, 1996:5), minor versus major, the linear becomes incised and shattered through fragments. Questions arise then as to whether the whole is indeed recoverable, or whether traces become plagued by slippages and irrecoverable facts, haunting the present through their absence. Indeed, the ultimate aim of this chapter is to demonstrate and expose how the invocation of these otherwise invisible memories brings with them a series of absences which permeate our present. These are traces of intermittent memories which are lost and distorted with the haze of amnesia, illegible traces incised upon the wax of the *mystical pad*, misinterpreted and incomplete fragments which fail to match up or sit aligned within the grand narrative.

And so, in various ways, this remains a hermeneutic task, almost archaeological in its crafting of mimesis or re-presentation. Digging and sifting through decaying and isolated fragments of the past; memories, photographs and stories: Trying to fit each one into the larger jigsaw of landscape and history. It is a process of disturbing and unsettlement, supplementing and remoulding. It is a task which weaves and tailors the past into a montage, demonstrating and operating through poetics and by citation. Like a series of captions added (Stewart, 1996:24, citing Benjamin, 1977) it draws attention to poignant moments and events, the intersections of the grand narratives and small tales. It is a contingent process which does not try to 'interpret' the past events

or label them according to grand structures. Nor does it attempt to gather or order these memories, or to close them off. It doesn't try to encode or analyse them for more than they are worth, but instead tries to create a lived understanding of the events which seep into the present. These stories of 'how things happen' create a narrative space which ruptures and contrasts against the flow of the everyday. Perhaps this montage of memory and history will allow us to see new images and disclose other messages, showing us that which is not normally seen, a witnessing of those things which we thought had been lost.

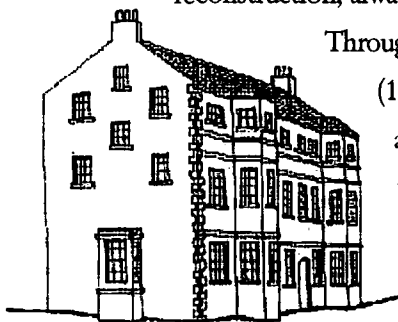


"No, she doesn't mean that," says Mummy gently from the opposite corner of the room. It was a misfiring of stories, each overlaying the others, their warped and distorted surfaces trying to fit into a plausible and acceptable version of history. Each fragmented story incongruously spiralling out of control against elements of others.

"I'll tell you later," muttered Mummy again, with a slight tinge of warmth and loving exasperation to her tone. She clearly doesn't want to contest Granny's story knowing full well they are just a dreaming together of favourite episodes; a patchwork of well versed and cherished instances.<sup>7</sup>

### Lane Ends Hotel

There aren't many visible memories of the past written into the landscape; old buildings which were falling into decay have been renovated or repainted to keep up the façade of Blackpool as a well-kempt, attractive destination. The earliest, often agricultural buildings have been replaced with the grandeur of romantic Victorian architecture. There has been an erasure of practically all Mediaeval signs, a deleting within and the fragmentation of the grand narrative of the town. All that is left of this embryonic stage is the prefabricated history; the history of history as it were, a reconstruction of events via a series of focal points and poignant images, told and retold as a story. "History is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete of what is no longer" (Nora, 1989:8).



*Mrs. Hutton's Hotel*

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the number of abodes swelled to twenty eight (1769) and whilst the majority of households were still engaged in farming and fishing activities, there are also signs of the start of the tourist trade to the village. By 1788 W. Hutton records "about sixty houses grace the sea; it does not merit the name of a village, because they are scattered to the extent of a mile". In August that year there were 400 visitors entertained by the bowling-greens, "butts for bow shooting", and many

<sup>7</sup> As it transpired later, that Granny in fact couldn't have meant that she had been to visit the *Sea Life Centre*, it was only built sometime in the 1990s. Upon further reflection, it was deduced that perhaps she meant the aquarium at the base of the Tower complex – although we can't be sure.

“amused themselves with fine ale at number 3”. For the evening the threshing-floor of a barn was turned into a theatre which when full held sixty, during the day time the visitors bathed. There were few bathing machines, so instead, “a bell was rung when ladies went to bathe, and if, during the time set apart for them, a gentleman was seen on the beach, he was fined a bottle of wine”.

The Lane Ends Hotel was one of the earliest noted boarding houses in the area serving this small holidaying population. It was the largest property in the village when it was built in 1750; a substantial farmhouse with a good sized garden totalling around 12 acres, known as The Marsh, The Great Yard, The Little Yard and The Hey. The owner, Thomas Lewtas erected a coffee house which was soon followed by a kitchen, then slowly developed the hotel to accommodate between seventy and eighty paying guests costing around 3s. 4d. a day.

In 1787 Mr. Lewtas advertised the lease; there was no shortage of interest, and in 1792 John Hudson of Stockport took it up renaming the hotel ‘Centre House’. Eight years later, when Mr. Hudson passed away, the hotel was once more offered for sale; this time taken up by Mr. William Yates who offered boarding at the premises; BED AND BREAKFAST 10D, DINNER WITH MALT LIQUOR 1s. 9 D, AFTERNOON TEA 10 D, SUPPER WITH MALT LIQUOR 1s. 3 D, SINGLE LODGING ROOM PER NIGHT 6 D WHICH PRICES HE FALTERS HIMSELF WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED EXORBITANT. In 1810, Henry Banks acquired the Lane Ends Estate and set about upgrading the hotel and erecting Blackpool’s first holiday cottages on the adjacent land. By 1816 Mr. Banks was able to charge his guests 4s. 4d. per day for the pleasure of lodging in his commodious establishment.

Up until the present day, in the ‘spirit of progress’, the renovation and upgrading continued. Eventually, the building was demolished in 1962, and, in the continuation of the linear, temporal sequence of production, consumption and disposal, a new building was erected. This new building now houses ‘Harry Ramsden’s Fish and Chip Shop’ which *The New York Times* reviews as “one of the chain’s most opulent restaurants, offering a takeout counter with a portion of haddock-and-chips suitable for munching during a promenade on the nearby pier” (anon., *New York Times*, 1997).



“Grandpa and Granny used to get the ‘charabanc’ bus from Dewsbury to Blackpool; they used to go over to Blackpool when ever they could. Not that often as they were running a business. There used to be a place called ‘half-way house’ where they used to stop off to get a cup o’ tea an’ a bun; the lady who ran it never used to give them enough, she



coined the phrase; “eh, ah’ve jus’ guessed your bellies!” when in fact they simply polished off their plates because the portions were so meagre.

The next stop of the journey was ‘Harry Ramsden’s’, you used to get it on the way into Blackpool – that’s how he made a name for himself, before eventually setting up shop there...”



It’s strange that places which have been so manipulated, morphed and changed over the course of history still prompt and gather collections of memory. Despite the erasures, demolitions and rebuilding, the modern and untarnished brickwork of Blackpool *does* still contain some stimuli, even if it is just a name or a specific patch of ground it is enough to prompt and reinvigorate memories, allowing a haunting absence of presence to circulate throughout the landscape. It is an endless process of returning without ever arriving; “in neither coming from somewhere nor going anywhere, the spectral constitutes an incessance that belies origins or end: a haunting” (Wylie, 2007b:171).

### Holiday Time

Blackpool spends half its life in hazy slumber; each spring it rouses itself to be reinvented, pregnant with possibility of interaction and engagement outside the dream. Its shakes from its mind the vivid patterns of sleep, stirring to retell its summer story, delineating holiday habits, making itself present once again as a sea-side resort; as a place for fresh air and fun where the likes of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsbottom could take Albert their young son. A grand little lad was Albert, all dressed in his best quite a swell, with a stick with an’ ‘orses ‘ead ‘andle, the finest that Woolworth’s would sell... (Edgar, 1932).



By the mid-nineteenth century the health-giving properties of the sea air as the primary attraction to Blackpool was waning. Visitors and daytrippers from a variety of social backgrounds now came to the area for entertainment. The North Pier was the first investment, designed by the prolific Victorian Engineer, Eugenius Birch, who was also responsible for designing fourteen other piers around Britain throughout his lifetime. Construction took place between 1862-3, costing approximately £11,500. The Pier subsequently opened in May 1863; a grand day for Blackpool, “a day of great pomp and circumstance and bands playing ‘The Blackpool Pier Polka’ (Jange, 1993:7). The houses and streets were decorated with flags, and the crowds flocked into the town. By the summer, the Pier was in full use, its penny toll segregating the ‘better’ classes from their social inferiors.



In 1968 the *Theatre Royal*, the first permanent purpose built theatre was built, opening as part of the rebuilding of the Talbot Road Arcade. These early theatres tended to be part of wider leisure complexes, for instance Winter Gardens, a substantial indoor leisure complex built between 1875 and 1878; “a place of resort for people of taste and refinement” (Walton, 1978:47). However, on the introduction of a ‘London music-hall experience’, there was a transition to a more working-class market, for those whose “dancing was heavy-footed, and manners rough-and-ready”. Such shows took place at venues across the whole of Blackpool, becoming the highlight and focal point of many trips;

**North Pier.** – Promenade Concerts by the NORTH PIER ORCHESTRA. The SPARKLETS CONCERT PARTY. “ON WITH THE SHOW,” a New Style Entertainment. THE ROUMANIAN BAND. *Autumn Guide, 1930* (cited in Jange, 1993).

“My mother always spoke of the freak shows on the prom – the mermaid who swam around in the tank for 50 minutes out of every hour. The two headed man, the giant gorilla and so forth. She always used to go round the back at break time and talk to them! The midget shows were obviously real; she had real sympathy for them”.



“Then there was Punch ‘n’ Judy on the Prom, it was free, but they used to collect coppers. Your Dad used to love Punch ‘n’ Judy – it’d have

him in stitches; ‘that’s they way to do it’. They had a baby too – used to bang it’s head on the top – the slapping of the wood; ‘it’s not going to sleep!’ they’d yelp”.

“If we were going to a show in the evening there would be great excitement. We’d all be wearing our best clothes and as an extra special treat we’d visit a proper chocolate shop. From the chocolate shop we’d walk down the Pier to the theatre with Mum having to watch where she put her feet as her stiletto heels would go between the slats of wood”.

~

The outstanding landmark and key symbol of Blackpool’s opulent populist distinctiveness, was the Tower, which opened in 1894. At 517 feet tall it dominates the skyline and is an object of desire drawing the crowds; “the excitement of being first to see the Tower on the top (Preston New Road/New Peel Corner)”. It was constructed along the lines of the Eiffel Tower which had opened only five years previously. In the base support of the lofty girders, disguised within the solid red brick base was a zoo, an aquarium, a circus – “where the floor used to drop and women used to dance”, a theatre, a spectacularly opulent ballroom, roof gardens and a restaurant. Indeed it was a resort complex in its own right; made accessible to all through an easily payable sixpence entry fee. Blackpool, as it has rightly been claimed, invented mass tourism; during the last quarter of the nineteenth Century, Blackpool easily outdistanced its competitors to become Britain’s most successful



affluent clientèle. Entertainment and shows which would appeal to families, for instance circus acts such as “‘Charlie Carli and Paul’ – Paul was the white faced clown who played the clarinet; from 1929 to ‘79, then his son carried on”.

~

The Tower now stands central to the gaudy collection of kitsch Victorian holiday developments and holiday memories; slightly outlandish, a bit ‘otherworldly’. It is a souvenir, part of a collection, constantly seeking self-enclosure; trying to form a decisive section in the grander classification and narrative of history (S. Stewart, 1993:151). Yet it can’t. There are too many hauntings which disturb this process of closure. Evoked memories, pictures, souvenirs and stories disrupt the linearity to which it seeks to conform. It is the apex to most memories of the area, its presence like an antenna broadcasting and receiving a surplus of memories always seeking to displace it from the present. It is always connected into a wider web of difference, constantly prompting and evoking haunting memories, perhaps even haunting in its own right.



### **Procession of things before our eyes**

This is the world of phantasmagoria where stories are fabricated and devious, contradictory and mobile, changing and changeable. It is the experience of movement before the eyes; fluxing memories rope and entwine about the grand progressional march of historically ordered temporality. Ebbing and fluxing memories ornament and decorate the settled history. They serve as a reminder, not just of the importance of that which is seen, but also the juxtaposition and interplay of memories and dreams. It is a landscape no longer solely concerned with the materialities with which we see, and no longer orientated towards the coming about of landscape and subjectivity in this particular moment, instead, it seeks to make live the memories, the past and



the immanent future; enlivening and situating the more febrile, secretive and ambivalent aspects of emotional life within the landscape. It is an evocation of a certain dreaminess and ghostliness, a peculiar mix of space and time; the normative order populated, disturbed and unsettled by haunting apparitions.



As I walk around Blackpool a procession of images moves before my eyes; the slightly dilapidated landscape of the modern town is supplemented by my parent's running commentary on the area that they knew from their childhood. It is like a series of captions lifted from another era, overlain onto a new and different place, bleeding and blending together as if in a dream. Figures and objects simultaneously reveal and conceal hidden histories; often ambivalently, always contingently. The spectral nature of the landscape is brought to present through their personal testimonies of poignant episodes, now steeped deep within their memories. Disruptions are created by specific events and anecdotes which still

provide amusement. Memories which hold particular sentiment or those which are simply so banal or habitual, have become engraved deep within their contingent view upon the landscape. Uncanny instances which perhaps ought to have remained hidden somehow come to light. There is an ebbing presence which gestures as an expression of feeling towards the unfinished and unspoken movements. Disruptions and ruptures to this present time and place. A destabilising of objects. A blurring of boundaries. Of Ghostly matters and warped Space.

### **An archive of memories**

"I always tanned so well. Went so brown when I caught the sun – I remember once when we went to see Ken Dodd, and I was laughing lots – we were right by the front. I was laughing so much that he said to me, "why are you laughing Missus? You look like a little brown Hovis with legs on!" Oh, it did tickle me."

She sits swamped in her armchair; cushions plumped to support her aching and failing lower back. Then repeated the same line once more; "... and he said to me, "ay, Missus', you look like a little brown Hovis with legs on". Oh, and we did laugh..." A sense of warm mirth animates her whole body, a twinkle lighting-up in her eyes. The story has a hazy fuzz-like quality, like a layer dust collecting on a slightly worn but still serviceable LP; it still brings a twinge of pleasure each time it is played, despite the warped lack of clarity which plagues and distorts it.



"The old man's interest lies in his determinateness, his body has as a whole become memory" (Serres, 1995:33). Memory materialises within the body and within movements; rhythmic stirrings beat out a gentle pulse deep within the mind, a constant churning over thoughts and recollections of past events and episodes, details and movements. Upon returning to a place after considerable absence, the landscape is not merely recognised in itself, rather there is an *accelerando vivance* of memory's tempo; the rhythmic pattern conflates with the present place and there is a gushing tide of absent past experience enacted within the particular landscape. The memory is not just for the place, but for the experience; it is the return of a circumstantial and contingent absence. It shows of the spectral nature of places, memories and subjectivities.

The fragmented landscape is worn deep with these 'living pasts'. History has physically merged into the setting; inexplicable and imperceptible events of the past are brought into a living form through the enlivening of memory. Imagined, lived and performed once more through their haunting presence; it is an endless process of returning without ever arriving. A hazy recollection of forms, never fully materialising within this saturated landscape; like shadows glimpsed out of the corner of the eye, they are dancing and pirouetting apparitions shifting with soundless steps across the landscape. They are spelling out a history not as accomplished fact or formless tendency, but as occupied in a space of contingency and desire, a history in which people and dancing, flickering shadows roam. This history is a matter of re-membering, a process of being hit by events, an aggravation that stirs a relentless scanning and chronicling (Stewart, 1996:90). They represent and tell stories about this landscape, of the past, the present, and the immanent future. They are always sensing, feeling and experiencing, transgressing boundaries and spelling out the landscape in new ways and affinities, feeding and underpinning this creative understanding.

### **The familiar illusion**

"Sarah, or Sally as she was affectionately known, was one of the five Booker daughters; they lived in Wombwell, Barnsley, near Wath-on-Dearn. She was probably born in 1903 – no she'd be older than that.... They ran a bake shop, a bake house really, bread and confectionary, you know. They were quite a rich family – the father owned the first car in the town. They sent their eldest daughter, Hilda, off to college to learn the trade properly then she could teach the sisters.

Now Dick, he was originally a miner, then he became the delivery man for the parents in Wombwell – eventually married Sally, some time not long after the first War – 1920ish. They set up shop on their own soon after in Dewsbury. Wakefield Road – they had a bake house and baker's shop and she was the baker.



“They always said Sally could get one extra barmcake out of the mixture, one more than anyone else, she could just handle it so much wetter.” He pauses and thinks of the action. “Used to take the dough enough in each hand and roll it on her apron on her front. That was in the bake house of course.

“No Dick, he wasn’t the baking brains or the business brains, he was the sales man really – did all the leg work. They had other staff as well. He used to get up early each morning and do the deliveries.

“They moved to Blackpool in 1946 – because one of their friends moved – and they ended up living in the house next door, looking for peace and quiet. I think Sally had a bit of a heart problem – she was always a big lady. I think they were hoping to retire – they’d been in the business for twenty years or so, so they didn’t need much persuading to move.

“They set up the fish and chip shop not long after – it became apparent there wasn’t quite as much to go round as they’d thought. They set up shop up in Thornton. They all moved there eventually and ran the chippy. It soon ran into problems though, there just wasn’t much trade after



the war – it was government policy to use ground nut oil to fry the fish and chips – so you can imagine that didn’t taste too good – fish and chips tasting of peanuts. So they packed up soon after. All the family was in Blackpool by then though”.



These ghosts and this phantasmagoria unsettle the history as we know it; they unpick and unfold the past using fragments to give form and unspoken potential. It is a landscape of irregularity and of change; “sliding forward, into keeping in step, collisions of things and affairs, and fathomless points of silence in between” (Vidler, 1999:186). It is constantly transforming, scraps and shadowy forms of the recent past entwine about, smother and obscure older memories; history is no longer a linear line of progress but incised and haunted by absences. Episodes are built upon episodes, as memories fragment and spur new hybrid memories. Personal and shared, contested and hazy, broken, and then rebound. Many memories are incommunicable narratives; stories change as parts are forgotten, lost within the depths of memory. Grey areas of less identifiable forms overwhelm any attempt to articulate certain specificities of these memories; smells which are only understood when smelt, rising pangs of excitement borne out of intense and



suspended anxiety, sensations of taste only gathered through the culmination of flavours, textures, smells and feelings. “These are disparate fragments, juxtapositions, traces and involuntary memories. Meaning is inferred from uncanny impressions and peculiar atmospheres that cannot be woven into an eloquent narrative” (Edensor, 2005a:162). These are unknown moments of the past, familiar yet distinctly elusive, disturbing the present and never fully revoked in themselves.

## VII Thinking *with* absence: a conclusion of sorts

Pas d'idées justes, justes des idées.  
There are no correct ideas, just ideas.  
Deleuze – 1977.

And so, as can be seen, absence truly is a question of definition. It is not a negative value nor is it a positive value; it is a time, a being and an abstraction. It is a *capacity*, a *temporarily* and an *affective resonance* which constantly ebbs, fluxes and fluctuates throughout the landscape; tracing and withdrawing, distorting and incising, nuancing and interweaving, making series of intricate patterns and traces which defy a single or definitive logic. The aim of this research has not been to pin down precisely what absence is, nor has it been to offer a concise definition of how absence may be encapsulated and made accountable within the social sciences. Rather, it has sought to think through the very problem of absence, questioning precisely why it has remained absent within the majority of contemporary narratives, and what may be afforded by including it and thinking with it within geographical, and, in particular, post-phenomenological narratives.

Through a series of diverse methodologies spanning from auto-ethnographic accounts to montage forms of narrative, it has sought to “discover, represent and share the hidden in the taken for granted” (Olsson, 1991:23). The narratives in themselves circulating and gathering, pleating and folding together otherwise absent and disparate elements manifested within the landscape. Momentary incursions of charged sensualities are brought together; the contingent, fractured, subjective and elusive have been bound and crumpled with affective prompts; the sights, sounds, smells and auras which imperceptibly saturate the landscape are rucked together. Compounded slippages and losses, particularly within the memory, in turn adhere and resurface in relation to certain scenes. The traces of the completely disappeared interweave and entangle throughout, marked only by a rich and fading trail of untranslatable signs and unfathomable symbols, brought to present in their distorted and broken forms.

My aim however, has not been to cover or touch upon all the vast and infinite vistas of absence, instead I have hoped to demonstrate and touch upon *some* of them within the landscape; detailing and presenting possible forms and narratives which are inclusive of some of these moments and movements of ubiquitous nonpresences. I have begun to spin an infinite typology of absences, starting a line from which new and diverse narratives may continue along or diverge from; to proliferate, interweave and create their own entwined routes, exploring other present and absent vistas and labyrinths within the landscape. When taken as a whole however, this research not only hopes to give a new account of landscape and landscape narratives, it also hopes to highlight the absence of absence within contemporary human geography and consider the importance of creating narrative spaces for absence within the broader social sciences.

Broadly speaking, it is a direct critique of nonrepresentational theory, yet it is *not* an attempt to denigrate or ignore all the promise afforded by the theory, for instance in its making the

unseen moments seen, its drawing out of otherwise invisible transitory actions, and its narratives of normally imperceptible events. Rather, it has been an attempt from *within* to further nonrepresentational accounts by offering the beginnings of a typology; a prolegomenon to demonstrate and consider both why absence is important, and how, through creative means and methodologies, it may be incorporated into future landscape narratives. Indeed, throughout all these narratives, both theoretical *and* empirical, nonrepresentational theory has worked as a distinct 'background hum' (Lorimer, 2008:556), always prompting and hinting towards new possibilities and potential affordances of integrating and manipulating different and diverse methodologies of form, technique and method.

Throughout, I have tried to consider and demonstrate the constant movement and fluxing between presence and absence, depicting how fading traces and withdrawals from presence to produce interpretative spaces of unanswered questions and amassed effects. I have aimed to show how the folding and pleating of present absences and absent presences call forth and substantiate new interpretative spaces of landscape with endless creations of new and infinite possibilities through the gathering of absence and its traces. I have tried to demonstrate how bringing together otherwise disparate entities provides endless affordances and possibilities, both within the landscape and its narratives. And how, through these interpretive spaces, there is always already more to say precisely because of the constant and incessant fluctuations, which in themselves already lead to a production and proliferation of more traces and fluctuations, fadings and distortions, fragmentations and tangles between presence and absence throughout the landscape.

Indeed, it is *because* of this constant movement and fluctuation that there is an absolute lack of conclusive statement upon which to end. Despite my reliance throughout upon story-like narratives there can be no 'the end' or moral to this geographical (hi)story. Absence, in the same way in which it may not be defined, may also not be rounded off. It does not pretend to speak for itself and it cannot give its own final statement, and so, instead, it merely calls for new and diverse modes of interpretation, for the continuation, creation and proliferation of new narratives and tales, traces and fragments, distortions and nuances which flux and ebb around and about it. As such, I will take my leave through one more empirical chapter; another montage, another narrative to touch upon some of this infinite number of continuously proliferating stories both in and of landscape, of past, presence, present and absent.

## VIII *Epilogue – one of many*

Successive living spaces never disappear, we leave them without leaving them, because they live in turn, invisible and present, in our memories and in our dreams. They journey with us.  
de Certeau & Giard, –1998:148.

### **Before the holiday**

Starched and ironed dresses hang all around the front-room, hooked over picture rails like angels suspended from up on high in an aim to keep any unwanted creases from creeping into the dense woven fibres. It's leading up to packing up day; there's a tense anxiety in the air as the day edges ever closer. Clothes are pulled from drawers, organised, washed, pressed, then left out in piles to be packed ready for the impending departure. The house is a flurry of activity; otherwise tedious jobs such as tidying and sorting are attacked with vigour in an attempt to while away the hours that little bit quicker.

Reading the opening notes Mummy jotted in my field-notebook of her memories of holidays to Blackpool reminds me of a chapter in one of the books I was read as a child. Allan Ahlberg's *The Bear Nobody Wanted* (1992) a tale which traces rejection, disaster and exile of proud and self-centred bear who both craves and fears the love of children. The chapter I am referring to begins the week before the Broom household, and all the whole neighbourhood, leave for holiday:

Mrs. Broom organised her children to tidy up their possessions: clothes, school things, but most of all, toys. She also organised her husband. His hobby was woodwork. He was encouraged to sort out his piles of wood, blueprints, woodwork magazines and so on. "Sorting out" really meant throwing away, and he liked to keep things. The children, it seemed, took after their father. They liked to keep things too. But with three children, and a baby, (and husband), in a little house, if things weren't tidied up now and then and *some of them* thrown away, the place would simply fill up like a bath and overflow (pp.40).

We *always* had to tidy and sort the house before we went away, gathering and straightening, sorting and piling. Odds and ends got stuffed out of sight into the back of drawers or in boxes under the bed. Somehow, even the tedium of banal sorting and tidying could never tarnish or diminish the expectant joy and fervour associated with holiday time. The fluttering sensation deep within the stomach; the taut intensity catching at your chest; the quickening of the heart. The night before anticipation crescendoed to almost unbearable levels; for weeks I would dream of this night with the holiday stretching far before me. My imagination used to run wild; the rushing intensity of being caught up in the billowing crowds, the sound of the sea, ice-cream treats, shows and staying up late. The burning sensation of the rushing wind hot on your cheeks, slot machines, building castles in the sand; and long walks along the promenade. Such possibilities upon reaching Blackpool.



### On the way

"I can see the tower!" read a recent text message received from my Mother on an otherwise rainy and rather uneventful Saturday afternoon. I could picture them both, sat there side-by-side in the front of the car; Daddy at wheel, making a soft guttural sound and gesturing slightly ahead with a knuckle as the Tower edged over the horizon; and Mummy looking on excitedly, before fumbling into the depths of her handbag to find both reading glasses and mobile phone.

The Blackpool-day-trip is habit for our family; the eternal return of the same. Every time we pass along Preston New Road onto Peel Corner the same cry of "I can see it!" goes up. Indeed, if I look at the sent messages from my phone, a similar message appears to that which Mummy sent me; mine had been sent from the train just a few months earlier. It is an ostinato, a motif of habitual performance; the craning of the neck, the pressing of the forehead against the cool, smooth glass leaving a slightly greasy mark patterned with hairlines in an attempt to catch the first glimpse of the Tower in the distance. It is an endless and uncanny drive, one which never loses its sense of childish magic. It is not just a nostalgic gesture of my childhood, but also one of my parents, and of their parents too. Their bodies have dwelt in these places, performing the same gestures over and over again; half-remembered recollections and habits which mesh with these histories of others, lingering in the landscape to be played out in fractured and broken ways.

Grandma and Grandad used to go on the train; "now, was it from Bickershaw or from Wigan? I can't remember, it used to go into Blackpool Central though. Grandma and Grandad Chamberlain wouldn't allow us to go on our own, so they came with us. I was probably 18 or 19. It was expensive; we used to have to save really hard. We went with friends too – she was Ivy, but I can't remember what he was called. We used to eat in the boarding house, it was always full of Scotch men; we had a right laugh".



### Upon Arrival

The seaside played an increasingly important part in the Lancashire cotton holidays. It was attractive to those seeking health, rest and self-improvement, and also to those whose preoccupations were more with novelty and entertainment, for the amusements of the urban fairground soon appeared at some of the resorts" (Walton, 1978:36). "The greatest time" (according to Mummy,) "was the first shopping trip after arrival – we were treated to some paper flags for the castles and pies. Everywhere you went you could buy buckets and spades and flags. The buckets were enamel, so if



you left them out they'd go rusty. You had to be really careful with them, especially the flags, they had to last for the whole holiday”.

“Blackpool always meant fun, Manchester was work! Even though upon arrival at the house [in Blackpool] we had to clean down, cut the grass, dig the gardens and so on, it was more fun than doing the same in Manchester because of the freedom of the cliff tops, the ceaseless changing of the sea and the thronging crowds of central”.

### *The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls*

Henry Longfellow, 1879

The tide rises, the tide falls,  
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;  
Along the sea-sands damp and brown  
The traveller hastens toward the town,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.  
Darkness settles on roofs and walls,  
But the sea, the sea in darkness calls;  
The little waves, with their soft, white hands  
Efface the footprints in the sands,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.  
The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls  
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;  
The day returns, but nevermore  
Returns the traveler to the shore.  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.



~

The wind tousled and pulled at my hair, its cold breath forcing me to tighten my scarf and quicken my step. Its invisible gusts breached the sands, carrying a swirling layer of dust just above the ground, marking and tracing its flurrying progress across the beach. Overhead, gulls floated effortlessly on the surges of breeze, their wings stretched at full span, their raucous calls piercing the gentle seaside acoustic. I forced my path to swing in towards the edge of the cliff, trying to escape the pervading blasts of air and the bleak temperatures brought with them.

The clouds ruptured leaving the beach bathed in a glorious brightness. The haze continued to part and the light intensified as the gap extended outwards. Despite the warming tinge brought about by this unexpected burst in the otherwise heavy and overcast sky, the light was cold and white. The rays caught the sea and the waves reflected the light; the rolling masses becoming all the more animated for the shining highlights upon their upper edges. The long waste of foreshore stretched almost up to the edge of the horizon, its gently textured surface bare and naked to drying warmth of sunlight. The vast ocean a mere glinting strip upon the horizon; the waves as if someone had gone along spilling small dashes of light into the depths. I felt so miniscule and almost imperceptible next to this vast and churning ocean.





### Arcade

Beams of sunlight shone down on the entrance to the North Pier, catching and glinting upon the half glass-wheel mounted high above the entrance. It is a transparent wheel-of-fortune, a roulette generator of chances, an actualiser of possibilities. The kitsch banner design joyously announces the North Pier to the world, it harps back to Blackpool's glory days; holding in store some inherently exciting element. The font reminds me of that often used by travelling circuses, spelling out fun and banal joviality; its artificial bubble lettering and bright juvenile colours suggest only good things may come from entering this opulent grotto.

It's hard to imagine the piers today without these arcades – they have certainly played a poignant roll in my day trips to Blackpool, and shaped my Mother and Father's memories of the holiday town. A trip to Blackpool isn't the same without trying your luck on the slot machines. Yet it wasn't until the '1960s Betting and Gaming Act' that gambling became legalised and the Pier ends where subsequently redesigned to accommodate for these newly legitimised amusements. "Roll up, roll up – make your fortune here", cry the itinerant touts who prowl along the Promenade searching for punters, adding their din to the cacophony, steadily directing the streaming masses to try their luck and gamble away their hard earned pennies.



Beneath the ornate banner a neon sign steadily flickers, marking and introducing the gaping black doorway as though a passage into another time and place. No light emits out from this darkened interior; it is secret, black and sealed. It is almost another world, divided and separate from the bright natural sunshine which bathes and gently warms the broad promenade outside. Yet this dark interior draws me; it is an opening to new possibilities. I venture towards the doorway; I become a voyager within the chiaroscuro, entering the darkened and sordid realm of exchange. "There's a break and there's an upsurge of hope, something turned to the future... whole fields of reality that are open" (Lingis, 2002:24).

### All forms of entertainment

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the perceived health giving properties of the sea air were the main justification for visiting Blackpool. In 1901, however, a booklet extolling the town's virtues as a health resort admitted that the majority of visitors came not for their health but for entertainment (Historical Town Assessment Report, 2005:29). The first investment in new



amusements came with the development of North Pier which opened in 1863, and was later extended to include a pavilion with a concert hall. This Pier was subsequently followed by the development of the Central Pier five years later, and Victorian or South Pier in 1893 (Palmer, 1987).

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercially run entertainment spanning from theatre shows to dancing, early mechanical fairground rides to garden attractions grew in popularity. But it was not only the development of the pleasure attractions in themselves, according to Walton (1978) the unusually relaxed, free-and-easy atmosphere of the resort meant working-class visitors enjoyed themselves unselfconsciously.



We used to go down to the Golden Mile to ‘watch the antics’. The swarming cohorts of people dressed-up in their best, going to and from shows; the atmosphere writhing with a positive and energetic intensity. The crowds filled the pavements, spilling out across the broad promenade; pavement vendors making the most of these holiday-happy crowds, selling kiss-me-quick and cowboy hats, rock, candyfloss, fish & chips and ice-creams. Photographers were stationed along the Promenade, snapping images of families and couples as they filed past. The pictures displayed the next day in newsagent’s window, identifiable by their unique number, from which they could be selected, paid for, then taken away as a memento of the occasion.

The atmosphere is addictive and inescapable; it is so easy to get caught up within the billowing crowds and to be swept along. The whole town twitches with a nervous energy throughout the summer time; from dawn until dusk, it never pauses for rest. And it’s not just the visitors who get swept up within the revelry. My Grandfather, Grandpa Shires, and his father-in-law, Dick Wilde, once placed a bet with each other that they couldn’t survive the length of the Golden Mile eating an ice-cream from each stall. Five pounds was at stake; “it wasn’t for lack of trying that they failed; some was good, some was bad, but they ate it. In the end, they called it off when they were half way down; it was declared a draw!”

### **The penny stakes**

There’s a tightening of atmosphere as I ease myself in the dim interior of the arcade. I blink. My eyes take a moment to adjust the luminous artificial lighting. Tinny music is pumped

from the garishly coloured machines, neon lights flash as images move across the sea of perspex screens. The light glints and deflects from their curved surfaces, warped patterns of inconvenient reflections disperse outwards. Tacky and worn buttons are dulled with greasy sweat from the exertions of previous players, the carpet worn bare and ingrained with grime; these are the tracks of the previous chance junkies. Despite the garish luminosity of the lights and the tacky, yet rather kitsch aura of the arcade, there still manages to be an underlying intensity in the air.



The arcade is, in many ways, a world of dreams; you can choose to be anything you want: a Japanese dancer; an alien invader; a formula one driver or a jockey. All the possible is implicated; all the possible is here, virtual (Serres, 1991:55). There are shooting games and slot machines, horse racing games and air hockey. Dancing games, adventure games, army games and win-a-teddy games set around the room. Various glass boxes are dotted about the arcade imprisoning kapok stuffed animals; the menacing mechanical arm leers from way above, threatening to puncture their garishly coloured fur, possibly freeing them from their geometric cells. Two penny and ten pence slot machines are dotted around the grotto, the hexagonal domes home to the sliding metallic trays stacked with precariously balanced coins and topped with a sparse scattering of goodies – fake watches, plastic necklaces, lottery tickets and two pound coins.

Each screen glows amidst gloom; some sporadically emit short fragments of tuneless digital melodies. One slot machine plays a worn and slightly flat version of the Beach Boys on loop; “lets go surfin’ now, everybody’s learnin’ how, come on and safari with me”. The sound is irrepressible; “sound always bathes the multiple, surrounds it, circumscribes it like a circumstantial aura; it bathes and penetrates” (Serres, 1991:131). The eyes can be closed but the ear is an open organ, inflicted by whatever noise is thrown at it. The sound dissipates throughout the room; an imperceptible atmospheric circulation, seeping into, around and even through the seemingly impenetrable. A certain intensity circulates with it; incessant clicking of buttons, the tumbling and clattering of coins, the ticking of the air hockey puck in its quickening and irregular beat. There is a progressive augmentation, a thwarting and impending crescendo which steadily builds to the deafening *sforzando*, bound within the cycle of betting, winning and losing.





### Turbulent weather

Outside, there was a dull and insipid quality to the air; a pulling back and steady inhalation of breath leaving a heavy atmosphere suspended over the coast. The sky was steadily deepening in intensity, the clouds thick and heavy. A few gulls soared over the matt sea, their normally piercing cries now distant and muted. We were stood at the end of the pier,

beneath our feet the gaps between the slats of wood revealed a churning mass of murky confusion. The daylight seemed to close in; the storm ahead devouring what was left of the sunlight; the opaque slanting columns of rain steadily approaching. We started back along the length of the prom towards the shelter of the arcade, patches of intensely textured minutiae fluctuations could be seen sheeting across the surface of the sea. We quickened our pace, our footsteps landing with a hollow thud on the wooden slats strung above the convulsing sea. A gusting wind. Then it began. Damp circles steadily patterned the wooden decking; the swathes darkened and billowing clouds closing in all around us. We ran the final paces towards the safety of the shoreline.



The waves used to crash against the sea-wall with a thump making the bed shake. You would wake up with a start in the middle of the night wondering where and what the commotion was for. Outside it was always very dark, not only the storm subduing any source of light, but also because the street lights were turned off at 10.30 or 11 each evening blanketing the street in darkness until the sun rose the following day.

In the morning, as the dawn ebbed into the day, and the cold glinting rays gradually crescendoed into a warming yellow, the delicate light of sunrise began to seep and illuminate the landscape, lighting the windows and showing a frosted and misty thin layer of whiteness. Like the blanketing silence brought by fresh snowfall, it seemed to dampen all the senses and overbear the landscape with its gently undulating contours. A delicate patterned trace left behind by the heavy-handed and raging storms of the night, which had whipped up the sea and carried the spray inland, dowsing the houses before withdrawing and leaving only this pattern of presence.

### The final push

Having swapped my heavy golden pound coin for fifty partially decaying coppers I choose my machine, closely examining each window to ensure I select the most precarious plateau of coppers. I pick the slot on the left, there's a glut of coins dangerously hanging over the edge, perhaps if I can knock one from the top it might force them over. I watch the hypnotic sliding back and forth, harmonising myself with its gentle rhythm before beginning. I slot.

To the right, to the right, come on, go to the right.

Maybe that'll knock that one, which'll push this.

It helter-skelters down between the plastic pins before coming to rest half leaning against the back. The tray silently slides forwards, the penny slips flat at the back of the tray and the plate recedes in its continuous mechanical action. My heart flutters; will it push it off? It slowly moves back.

Nothing, the coins just shunt together, overlaying themselves.

I slot again, the Queen's slightly tarnished but still noble nose tumbles down between the pegs. Helter-skelter, there she goes. The plateau is just that little bit more precarious now. There is a whole new chance that it might fall this time. The plate recedes, my copper shunts its compatriots off the step, they descend from the top plate. Maybe this one will be the one to force them over the edge into the depths of the void? I hold my breath; it's almost like watching chance being played out in slow motion, the dropping and double shunting before that euphoric clatter of coins into the metallic tray at the bottom.

Nothing. They just shunt together again.

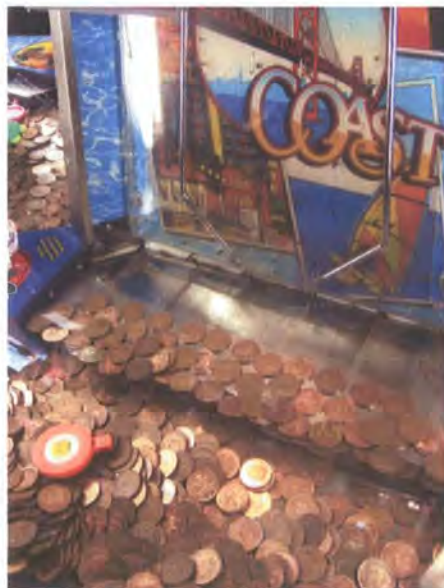
There's a sickening feeling deep within my stomach; I'm unsure whether it's the stale stench oscillating round the room or if it is induced through my own excitable and pent up hope. Slotting then waiting. One more go then perhaps I should move to another window? A penny spurred by a penny, spurred by a penny. Slotting which gives way to yet more slotting.

Helter-skelter-lying-back-pushing-forward. Receding-pushing-knocking

-off.

Shunting-forward.

Shunting-back.





There I have it! There is a satisfying clatter as the nose of the plateau is calved off plunging down into the darkened void. I stoop to collect my winnings my face forced right up to the glass as I bend. The pennies inside almost jeer at me in their illogical defiance of gravity. They incense me to try my luck again so I begin to slot once more.

### **Sand in the sandwiches**

Despite the growth and development of organised amusements, the sea and sand still remain as one of Blackpool's greatest attractions. The sea is always lively, even on calm day it constantly ebbs and fluxes. The slightest breeze is enough to whip it up into a frenzy of foam, waves and spitting spray. When the tide was in, if it was a breezy day, I would make sure I was close enough to the seawall so that I'd get drenched as the waves crashed against the shore.

Not too long ago I remember walking up the prom on a particularly overcast and chilly day; the visibility out to sea was poor, perhaps only a mile or two, and gusts of wind were racing up and down the coast, forcing the sea into an undulatory pattern of swells and troughs. I remember being distinctly transfixed by the waving pattern of the water as it forced up against the seawall, the swell working its way along up the smooth concrete. Every so often, a strong wave would march in, its force splattering plumes of spray high into the air, before it subsided and slipped back towards the horizon making way for the next. Every seventh or eighth wave, a powerful swell would surge forward, punching its weight against the seawall before ricocheting backwards and clashing with the next incoming peak. The surface would momentarily be transformed into a tumultuous and churning mass of foam and spray forced high into the air before slamming back down with a clamouring boom. The surface patterned instantaneously with frothing foam and brown patches of suspended sand held deep within itself.

~

When the conditions are far kinder and tide is out tourists and visitors amass on the beach. The beach is never deserted; even in cold, wet and dank conditions, figures can be seen wandering across the beach. Dog walkers, families, and children playing: "Kite flying, playing golf – such huge spaces which make these things easily possible!"

We moved off the concrete of the Promenade and headed down towards the sand towards the other figures dotted across the beach. Rivulets snaked their way across the rumpled surface; merging and emerging patterns, meandering and diverging across the surface. Underfoot, the waving textures are uneven; the tread of the foot causing concentric circles to expand and dissipate



outwards as the pressure dries the sand. Traces of the previous passages are printed and interwoven upon the damp surface; incising and picking in and around the puddles which rest upon the surface of the saturated sands.



In summertime, donkeys plod the length of beach between Central and South pier; “do what you will, they will not go beyond their ‘run’!” In years gone by, ‘jugs of tea for the sands’ used to be served on Central beach, where it was possible to buy a pot or jug of tea with a tray of mugs. Plastic cups and take-aways were still waiting to be invented and brought to the mass consumer market.

~

Daddy and I always built the biggest castle on the beach with a moat around it. It was my job to make sure the moat didn’t run dry – it must have kept me busy for hours! He also used to take us into the sea on the lilo – we’d scream as large waves would toss us about and our mouths would get full of salty water. When the tide was in we’d go onto the pier. The adults would sit on deck chair very close together and chat. We were allowed to go and play in the slot machine area, we’d have a shilling changed into pennies, 12 pennies went a long way.

~

We sit on the new steps which line the length of the Promenade down the Golden Mile, tucking into our sandwiches. Behind us, the Tower stretches infinitely upwards, its regal red shining in the early afternoon sun. On my right the North Pier stretches out into sea, the receding tide gently lapping at cross-hatched supports, above, I can just make out groups of people slowly walking its length, or just sat, watching the world pass by. In front of me, a toddler makes a few stuttering steps towards the sea, fascinated by the simmering and changing texture of the surface as flecks of light shimmer and glint upon the gently chuckling waves.

Whilst I munch upon my lunch, I suddenly realise that I don’t think I have ever been in the sea. I’m sure I have probably dipped a toe in, or played in the surging tide; running backwards and forwards chasing away from the streaming and continuous torrents of gushing water; but I don’t think I’ve ever swum in it, or had a ‘proper dip’.

It still feels so familiar though; each time I walk along the shoreline and stare out onto the horizon, it conjures up so many memories. Half-remembered recollections from my past, meshing with the history of



my family which lingers and enlaces the air with an aura of familiarity. Perhaps it is merely the regular conversations and trips to Blackpool which has made my task of remembering so convoluted and complex. I have absorbed and merged their memories as my memories. Their experiences have become mine.

### **The final bet**

I reach into the depths of my pocket and scoop out the remaining coins. Only two left; if I play the timing right then perhaps I can knock off that teetering plateau I have worked so hard to build up, forcing more chances over the edge. I slot the first coin. It helter-skelters down between the plastic pins before coming to rest on the top plate. The plate recedes.

Nothing gets knocked off.

I'm down to my last coin, my last possible foray with chance. I wait for the plate to slide back, at the moment it starts to push forward once more I slot. Helter-skelter as it dodges it way down the back into the midst of the machine. It reaches the top plate, sliding down as the mechanical action pushes the slider forwards. The plate recedes once more in its continual kinetic rhythm, my coin is shunted forward; it pushes two off the top plate. I wait for it to shunt my winnings over the edge.

Pushing-forward.

Pushing-forward.

I hold my breath. They shunt together, the entirety of the contents on the bottom plate shift and advance. I hear some clinking, my heart flutters. I stoop to collect my winnings; the collection tray is empty. The arcade's play of 'unequal chance' has caught me out, the winnings belong to the arcade this time. A slight feeling of dejection comes over me. It's time to leave. I am only a pound worse off.

There's always next time I suppose.

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